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BOARD OF TRUSTEES DECLINES TO DIVEST, CITING NEGLIGIBLE EXPOSURE TO WAR

By COLE CHAUDHARI
Managing Editor

On Monday, Sept. 30, Middlebury College released an update on its process of examining the endowment for investments in or connections to the war in Gaza. The college announced that it would not be taking any actions towards divestment from war profiteering, claiming it only maintains minimal investments in companies suggested for review.

Titled "Middlebury's Exposure to AFSC's List of Companies," the announcement explained that per the request of Middlebury students earlier in 2024, the Board of Trustees audited the endowment's investment portfolio against a list of 45 companies determined by the American Friends Services Committee (AFSC) to be profiteering from the ongoing war in Israel and Gaza. This list comprises both companies that manufacture products used directly in the war, including

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STUDENTS MARK OCTOBER 7 ANNIVERSARY WITH PROTEST, MEMORIAL SERVICE

FREE PALESTINE
CEASEFIRE
DISCLOSE!
DIVEST!
We Will NOT STOP
We Will NOT REST

PHOEBE AN / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Middlebury students continued to push for divestment at Monday's protest at the Chapel.

By ROSELLA GRAHAM & LILY McGOVERN
News Editor & Contributing Writer

On the one-year anniversary of the Oct. 7 terrorist attack in Israel, followed by the ongoing war in Gaza, members of the Middlebury community came together in a variety of spaces this Monday to mourn the lives lost and reflect on the past year of violence.

Beginning at 11:30 a.m., approximately 100 students, faculty, staff and local residents gathered at the Middlebury Chapel for a walk-out and rally organized by the Middlebury Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) on Monday, Oct. 7. Over four hours of SJP programming was divided into six segments: the walkout, a rally, a 100 year history lesson on Palestine, a divestment workshop and a grief space. The event was registered and approved by the college in line with the administration's communication at the start of the semester clarifying that unregistered protests may result in official college discipline.

Later that night at 7:30 p.m., members of the college community gathered for a memorial service for the lives lost in the Oct. 7 attack last fall. This event followed a day of open spaces on campus hosted by Middlebury Hillel and the Scott Center for Jewish students to come together, grieve and reflect on the ways the conflict has impacted their lives this past year.

Middlebury SJP's "Week of Rage"

The SJP programming on Monday began with a rally, where student speakers called on students to keep thinking about the genocide in Gaza and to continue to speak out against Israel's pursuit of the war.

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College Street stabbing case holds hearing, requests sanity assessment for defendant

By CAROLINE JIAO
News Editor

On Oct. 7, 2024, the Criminal Division of the Addison County District Court heard a brief competency hearing for Jerry L. Hoffman, who was charged last spring with attempted murder in the second degree, aggravated assault with a weapon and resisting arrest.

On March 20, 2024, Hoffman approached Huy Tran '24 from behind and attacked him with a knife. He was charged with attempted murder in the second degree, aggravated assault with a weapon and resisting arrest.

Hoffman, who has pleaded not guilty and is currently being held without bail, joined the hearing remotely from Marble Valley Correctional Facility, while his attorney James Arthur Gratton arrived in person. Judge Robert W. Katims presided over the hearing and Addison County State's Attorney Eva P. Vekos represented the state.

If convicted of the current charges, Hoffman would face life in prison and heavy fines. In the initial weight-of-the-evidence hearing, which took place on March

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STAFF COUNCIL SURVEY SHOWS MIXED RESULTS AS COMPENSATION ISSUES PERSIST

By RYAN McELROY
Editor in Chief

The Middlebury Staff Council conducted a survey of all college employees from Jan. 15 to Feb. 12, 2024, receiving responses from 549 individuals, or 55% of staff members. The highest response rates were in Academics (which includes department coordinators and the Office of the Registrar) and Library/ITS. The only three staff districts — Staff Council's categories for college employees — with less than half of their employees represented were Dining, Business Affairs and the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey (MIIS).

Three key themes identified by the Staff Council were "pride in our workplace," "general happiness among employees" and a general improvement compared to the previous survey in 2021, according to a spring 2024 presentation given to administrators and staff that was shared with The Campus. The survey also revealed that concerns about compensation, workload and the cost of living in Vermont and Monterey remain top concerns for college employees.

Toni Thomas, associate dean of academic operations at MIIS and Staff Council representative at large, served on this year's survey subcommittee along with two other representatives and two employee volunteers. She told The Campus that the Staff Council will break down the data into district-specific results this fall to share with specific supervisors and vice presidents after they worked to ensure representation from all areas of the college.

"We tried to make it more accessible for staff that work in departments where they're not necessarily sitting at a desk most of the day like I am, but a lot of the facilities people, dining people, custodial people," Thomas said, adding that other representatives provided dedicated opportunities for their district members to access and fill out the form.

Thomas also reflected that she hopes to work on fostering interdepartmental connections after seeing a wider disconnect across areas of the college and different staff members.

"One thing that I was a little bit surprised about is that there was not a lot of connection or communication across departments. And I think that's really an area that we can continue to try and see how we improve that so we're not making decisions in a silo," she said.

Thomas expressed her gratitude for the over 500 staff members who took the time to respond to the Staff Council's 2024 survey, adding that it will help inform their work in the coming year.

"We appreciate all the staff that took the time to fill out the survey and share their concerns with us. And we look forward to continuing to help represent them and work on the issues that are particularly of interest," Thomas said.

Compensation

This year's survey demonstrated that

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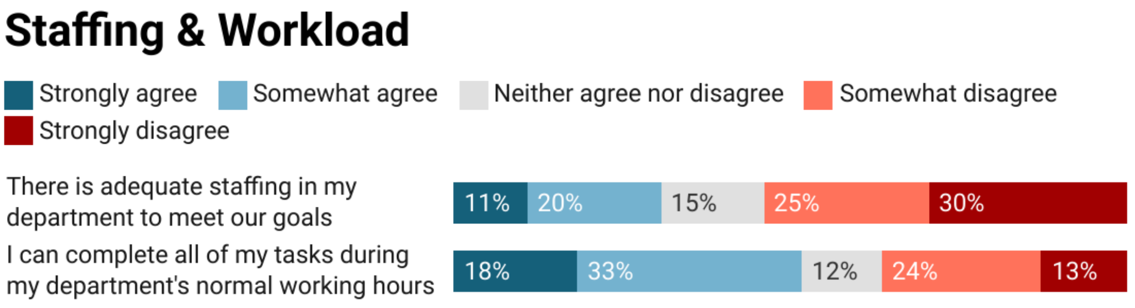

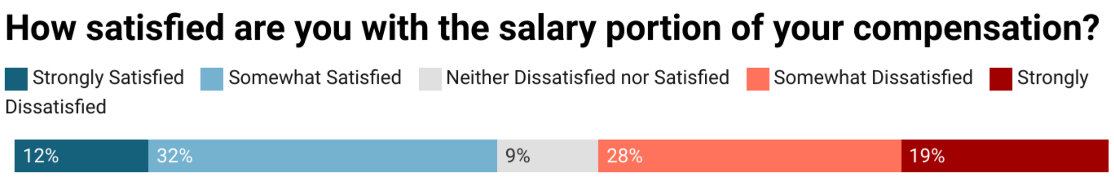

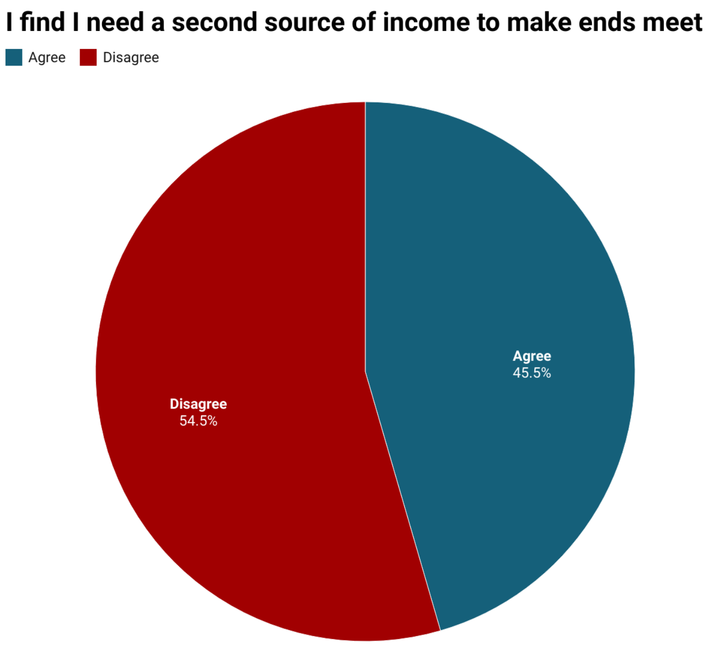

RYAN MCELROY / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

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STUDENTS MAIL IN BALLOTS, REGISTER TO VOTE AHEAD OF NOVEMBER ELECTION

By PHOEBE AN
Contributing Writer

COURTESY PHOTO/ DANIZA TAZABEKOVA

MiddVotes hosted watch parties for the presidential and vice presidential debates in Wilson Hall.

As conversations about the upcoming presidential election build on campus, Middlebury students continue to register to vote and request absentee ballots from their home states across the country. Historically, Middlebury students have had a widespread interest in voting: During the previous presidential election, 98% of Middlebury students at the time were registered to vote, a 23% increase from the 2018 midterm elections.

Preparing for the upcoming 2024 presidential election, student organizations have worked to encourage students to remain as civically engaged as their predecessors. In particular, MiddVotes, a nonpartisan student organization dedicated to fostering student civic engagement, has been working diligently to aid students in registering to vote alongside supporting civic education on campus.

So far, MiddVotes has hosted bi-weekly voter registration drives outside dining halls on campus. Although the club does not count exact numbers of students they've helped register, they reported assisting an estimated 150 students since the start of this semester and an estimated 600 since 2021.

As voter registration deadlines approach, MiddVotes is shifting from registration aid towards assisting students in the actual process of voting. As many college students hail from out-of-state, MiddVotes plans to support them in requesting absentee ballots and voting itself.

For some students, registering to vote and requesting an absentee ballot is more complicated than they expected. Depending on individual state laws, deadlines for these processes and other policies may look very different.

Claudia Lopez '26, a first-time voter registered in Texas, faced challenges with voter registration and the process of requesting an absentee ballot. Texas does not offer online voter registration, and Lopez is currently studying abroad, meaning the registration process was delayed until she was able to physically return to Texas.

Lopez then requested her absentee ballot online from abroad. "It's a bit tedious since there is a lot of printing and mailing involved, [which] is not free where I'm studying abroad," she said.

Despite these difficulties, Lopez told The Campus she believes in the importance of her vote regardless of the obstacles.

"It's important for me to vote because I think Texas has a good fair amount of voters from both Republican and Democratic parties which could make or break the election," Lopez said.

Some students from states whose predicted electoral outcomes lean more firmly towards a particular political party than Vermont are choosing to vote in Vermont instead of in their home state. For this years' national election, James Cummings '25, who hails from Jackson, Wyo., has decided to cast his vote in Vermont.

"I come from a state where the election is even more skewed than here, so my vote won't really matter either way, except maybe in local elections. And I think it will be a fun experience to vote in person as opposed to by mail," Cummings said.

Despite varied voting processes, students shared a common desire to remain politically curious, something Daniza Tazabekova '26, president of MiddVotes, hopes to channel. While MiddVotes primarily assists students in their voting endeavors, Tazabekova said she plans to transform the organization and the broader definition of civic responsibility for Middlebury students beyond simply registering to vote and cast a ballot.

For many, civic responsibility entails voting in the presidential election every four years. However, Tazabekova believes that civic responsibility includes a wider range of actions.

"When I think of civics, I think of a common set of goals, morals, or values that we all share; that push us to be better people, whether that is in government, public policy, families, relationships, friendships, and communities," Tazabekova said.

The hope to broaden what civic responsibility means has led Tazabekova to expand MiddVotes' efforts into civic education. Throughout the previous and current semester, MiddVotes has taken more creative approaches to engage with students both locally and federally.

Most recently, in collaboration with the Center for Careers and Internships (CCI), MiddVotes hosted a speaker panel of Middlebury alumni who participated in the 2024 Democratic National Convention. MiddVotes also recently hosted watch parties for the presidential and vice presidential debates in Wilson Hall, which both saw dozens of students in attendance.

On the local front, MiddVotes encourages students to participate in town meetings, with members offering to drive students to Town Meeting Day in Middlebury. What Tazabekova described as a novelty to students from urban areas, town meetings are not only an opportunity for students to see how local legislation is established, but also to become aware of issues central to the local community.

MiddVotes will continue their bi-weekly voting registration drives and assistance with their absentee ballots until general electoral deadlines. Despite this new emphasis on diverse forms of civic engagement, Tazabekova continues to emphasize the importance in voting, mentioning that high voter registration rates do not necessarily equate to high voter turnout.

"Voting is a privilege. If you have the right to vote you should exercise that right to vote and MiddVotes is here to support you in that endeavor," she said.

Students reflect on Oct. 7 anniversary with protest, memorial service

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"Palestine is what should unravel our view of the world, of our governments, of the international institutions that we thought would protect humanity, but instead continue to enable and be active participants in the genocide of Palestinians," the first speaker said. "While we get to sleep at night, bombs rain down on Palestine and Lebanon."

Athena Antippas '26 spoke next, reminding protestors of Middlebury College's financial connections to companies protestors alleged are tied to war profiteering in Israel.

"We are disgusted that money paid by every single American student, faculty member and staff member on this campus goes towards funding weapons and technology that fuels the global military industrial complex and specifically has led to thousands of deaths in Gaza," Antippas said.

Protestors periodically interrupted her speech with calls of "Shame," punctuated by a student loudly playing the tuba. They also participated in chants, such as "Middlebury, you can't hide, you're supporting genocide," "Not another nickel, not another dime, no more money for Israel's crimes" and "There is only one solution, Intifada revolution."

Antippas also spoke about the impact of the Gaza Solidarity Encampment that student activists established last spring, when they camped out on McCullough lawn for eight days with various demands, including divestment, a call for a ceasefire by the college and other institutional actions.

"The administration would never have let us into those negotiation rooms on their own good will without the encampment. The administration would never have agreed to accept Palestinian students from Gaza without the encampment. The administration would never have called for a ceasefire without the encampment," Antippas said.

As the day went on, the group transitioned from speeches to educational workshops, offering education on their divestment efforts in hopes of building new momentum this fall, according to SJP leaders.

"Today was really just about commemorating one year and raising awareness and education and really bringing back the spirit of the encampment from last year," said one leader of SJP in an interview with The Campus following the protest. "It is really important that we continue educating people and continue getting people out, because we want to hold the school accountable to what the student body wants."

"We're grateful for our relationship with administration, and we appreciate that they're listening to us in their physical presence at our demonstration," another leader of SJP said that afternoon. "We also hope that it's a reflection of their actual policy changes, in the promises that they made last semester, especially in the statement."

The statement in question, "A Commitment to Common Educational Values," called for a ceasefire and promised conversations with both students and trustees about the codification of divestment from armaments. It recognized SJP's demands from the encampment last semester, prompting the encampment to disband. Members of the organization remain in communication with administrators about their proposals on divestment, and SJP leaders acknowledged how college leadership is coming to the table with a different perspective than them.

"Once we're in these rooms with administrators, there is a level of bureaucracy that we do have to deal with," one leader of SJP said. "Making sure that even in those meetings, negotiating with the urgency of a genocide is really important to us."

Oct. 7 Memorial Service

At 7:30 pm that day, the Middlebury Chapel also hosted an Oct. 7 Memorial Service sponsored by Middlebury Hillel and the Scott Center for Spiritual and Religious Life that invited community members to "remember and grieve the lives lost on October 7 through poetry, music, prayer and ritual," according to the event listing on the college's calendar.

Co-President of Middlebury Hillel Evie Happel '26 shared the group's intentions for hosting opportunities for Jewish students to gather together on Monday.

"We've acknowledged that it's a time of extreme grief and loss, and we've been doing a lot to support students. In honor of the anniversary, we're having open hours for Jewish students at our at the Jewish student center and having a memorial service," Happel said, adding that the open hours would allow students to come together and connect in a quiet, reflective space.

Middlebury Chabad previously held a vigil outside of McCullough Student Center in conjunction with Jewish students on Oct. 11, 2023 for the lives lost on Oct. 7 last year. The Muslim Students Association held a "Vigil for Palestine" inside the chapel on Nov. 9, 2023 to mourn those who died in Gaza.

A Jewish student who asked to remain anonymous said they helped plan the SJP protest, adding that the location of the rally was decided before the organization knew about Hillel's intention to hold a vigil there that night. The student shared that the organization did not want to create any tension between the two groups with its protest.

Amidst the memorial and open spaces for Jewish students to gather on Monday, Middlebury Rabbi Danielle Stillman reflected on the increasing challenges posed by antisemitism at Middlebury in the wake of the war in Gaza.

"I've noticed an increase in antisemitic stereotyping on social media, including Middlebury's Yik Yak platform. These things sometimes spill over into real life," Stillman wrote in an email to The Campus. "This war has brought a lot of polarization here in the U.S., and with it there has been an increased tendency to make assumptions about people based on their identities, rather than seek them out for conversation that would lead to more understanding."

Students at the college have previously expressed varying levels of concerns about antisemitism in the past year; the StandWithUs Center for Legal Justice filed a complaint with the Department of Education last January alleging a "hostile campus climate for Jews," a claim that the college responded to by launching a public webpage detailing community standards and support for students affected by the conflict.

"I think some members have and some members haven't," Happel said, when asked if Middlebury Hillel has noticed a similar rise in antisemitism this past year.

Stillman added that even if others at the college do not intend to be antisemitic, their actions may have a negative impact on Jewish students at the college.

"When people make assumptions, it can be experienced as antisemitic even when this is not the intent. There has also been a lot [of] insensitivity to the emotions that some Jewish students have been feeling," she wrote. As a member of the Scott Center, Stillman said cooperation with colleagues across Middlebury's religious life is still a key part to supporting each other and a variety of students on campus.

"We make every effort to listen to each other's different perspectives, care for each other and the different student constituencies we each work closely with, and learn from each other," Stillman wrote. "The only change since October 7th is the importance of this communication with each other has intensified."

SJP visits Boston, looks to future action

In the spirit of building more momentum and maintaining pressures on the college for change, some members of SJP traveled to Boston this past weekend to attend the International Day of Action organized by the Boston Coalition for Palestine. The event was a convergence of different SJP chapters from the New England area, as well as independent protestors.

"It's really great to leave the Middlebury bubble and see what people on the ground are doing, especially in metropolitan, more densely populated areas," said one SJP leader who attended the rally in Boston. "It was a really great opportunity to just meet with other people who treat this issue with as much importance as we do, who understand the gravity of the situation, and who aren't necessarily so isolated like we are in such a rural setting."

Protestors marched from Boston Common to Storrow Drive, eventually rallying outside the Israeli consulate. Flyers stating "One year of genocide, one year of resistance" were spread by the pro-Palestinian student groups organizing the event.

Throughout the development of the war and SJP's evolving approaches to its activity on campus, grief and sorrow have been constant. Leaders of the club have stated they intend to prioritize creating grief spaces for all students on campus.

"I think another really big element that we have today is grief. We will be holding grief spaces in the future, because we think it's an important thing to have," another SJP leader added.

The National SJP has designated its Oct. 7 through Oct. 11 protest series the "Week of Rage," calling for vigils, rallies and many speakers across college campuses in the U.S. Middlebury's chapter of SJP expressed a desire to bring back the high energy from last spring, while acknowledging the developments these past six months will impact their mission.

"The student protest scene has also been changing a lot, and I think it's been really great to see turnout for a new semester and a refreshing course of action for what we're gonna get accomplished this year," one of the organization's leaders said.

Editor's Note: Editor in Chief Ryan McElroy '25 and Managing Editor Cole Chaudhari '26 contributed reporting to this article.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES ELECTS NOT TO DIVEST, CITING NEGLIGIBLE EXPOSURE TO WAR

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Lockheed Martin Corporation, Sturm, Ruger & Co. and Northrop Grumman Corporation, and companies that do not primarily manufacture arms or defense systems but contribute to arms manufacturing, like General Electric, Volvo and Rolls-Royce Holdings PLC.

As of Feb. 28, 2024, Middlebury's exposure — the amount of money invested — to those companies totaled 1.10% of the total endowment through six different investments, according to the announcement.

Members of Middlebury Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) met with various administrators and the Board of Trustees throughout the late spring and summer of this year while working on their divestment campaign. On May 10, SJP leaders presented their divestment campaign to the Resources Committee of the Board of Trustees. Next, they met on May 24 with Executive Vice President of Finance and Administration David Provost, Vice President of Student Affairs Smita Ruzicka, Board of Trustees Chair Ted Truscott and Vice Chair of the Investment Sub Committee Caroline McBride to initiate conversations about divestment.

Also on May 10, the Student Government Association (SGA) released the results of a referendum in which students voted in favor or against four divestment objectives. The requests concerned financial transparency, removing investments from arms manufacturers and war profiteering firms, and ceasing financial support for Israeli businesses. Over 1800 students, or around 72% of those on campus during the spring semester, voted in the referendum, with large majorities supporting each of the four items, according to the SGA.

In June, SJP liaisons to the Board of Trustees presented the Investment Sub Committee of the Board of Trustees with a revised list of proposed companies from which to divest, which narrowed down the original 45 companies to 23 corporations.

The list was revised in the hopes of achieving progress on common ground towards their divestment objectives, according to SJP liaisons.

"As negotiations continued, we narrowed the list to demonstrate our willingness to come to a middle ground, while still emphasizing companies that are contributing to crimes and atrocities according to international law," the four student liaisons wrote in an email to The Campus. On Oct. 23, 2024, members of SJP will present to the Resource Committee of the Board of Trustees and the College Board of Advisors.

The exposure of the endowment to those companies named on the AFSC list dropped to 0.4% after being checked against the revised list, according to Provost. The biggest change, according to him, came from the removal of General Electric, which individually comprised roughly 0.6% of the 1.10% figure from the investment report from February 2024.

In August 2024, the Board of Trustees opted not to divest the narrowed 0.4% exposure, stating that the investments maintained in the target divestment companies were small enough such that the school was not profiteering from war, according to the announcement.

Middlebury, like financial peer institutions Wesleyan University and Brown University, relies on outsourced financial planning firms to manage the endowment portfolio. The college has contracted with Investure, a firm based in Charlottesville, Va. since 2005.

The objective of investing the endowment is to grow the portion of the endowment from which Middlebury can pull to fund annual operations, according to Provost. Each year, Middlebury releases five percent of its endowment — as of 2024, roughly $80 million — to fund operations for that year.

Provost explained in an interview with The Campus that Investure contracts with individual financial managers to select funds and companies into which to invest portions of the endowment. According to Provost, the college is in a pooled fund alongside 13 other institutions and organizations. This structure makes it impossible for Middlebury's endowment to selectively withdraw from certain companies or funds without the consent of all 13 other fund members.

Provost explained that while the college maintains a close partnership with Investure, the Investment Sub Committee does not have any direct control over any single investment. In 2005, after establishing a contractual relationship with Investure, the Board of Trustees presented the firm with an investment policy, stating the school's intention to minimize risk, maximize yearly returns and maintain ethical standards with regard to the investments made for the endowment. According to Provost, the Board of Trustees examines Investure's performance and adherence to the investment policy every 10 years, and the college is currently in the midst of its second review of the partnership with Investure.

The urge for Middlebury's divestment from companies manufacturing arms or profiting off of war builds on a successful student-led campaign to divest from fossil fuels, which began in 2011 and sparked the creation of the Energy2028 initiative. In 2019, the Board of Trustees approved a 15-year divestment plan, which will completely phase out fossil fuel investments from the endowment by 2034.

According to Provost, divesting from companies aiding or abetting the pursuit of armed conflict is a much less specific or clear process than divesting from fossil fuels.

"Fossil fuel is a very specific industry with very specific companies. This list that the student negotiators have given us is a broad range of companies and a broad range of industries. It includes car companies, it includes airline companies and it includes companies like ExxonMobil," Provost said.

He argued that the students negotiating on behalf of the fossil fuels divestment movement framed their argument in terms of ensuring continued environmental support and impact for later activists. He asserted that, from the perspective of maximizing returns on an endowment, there is a distinction to be made between divestment objectives that operate on an abridged time scale — in this case, ending the college's financial associations with arms manufacturers and companies implicated in war — and those that cannot possibly be resolved within a single lifetime.

"Those student protestors made a generational argument. 'Look, your generation is handing our generation climate change. We are being educated, and we will become the leaders to address it, but help us today.' This current charge is without that validity and credibility," Provost said.

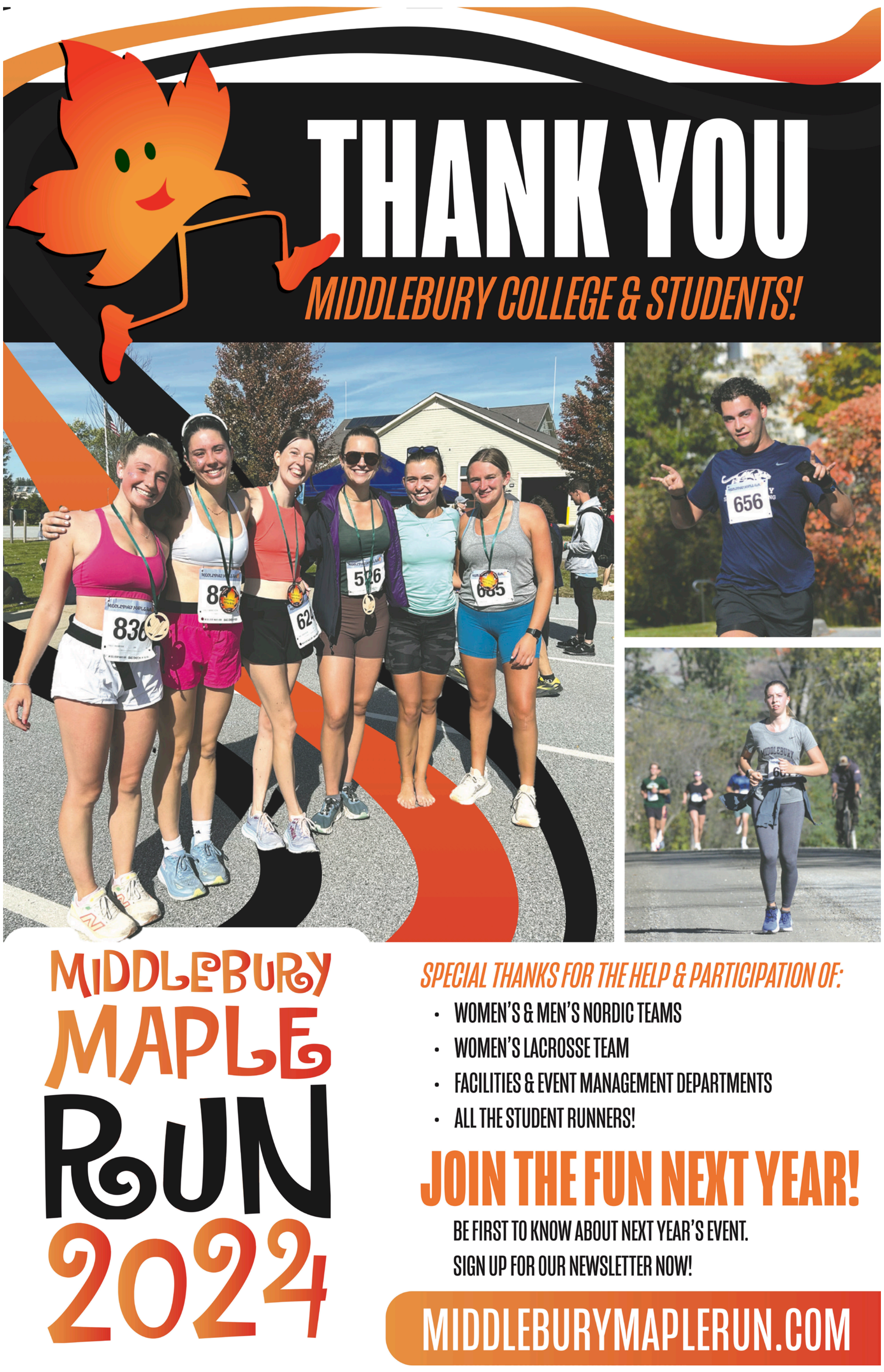
Though the Board of Trustees has declined to take coordinated action on divestment, SJP still maintained that their actions are oriented towards long term objectives and success.

"We understand that any divestment process will take years. That is why negotiations are only a piece of the puzzle to advocate against a more broad US complicity in genocide. Our working relationship with administration has allowed us to learn information about our institution that demonstrates our embedded role in the U.S. system," SJP liaisons wrote. "Our goal is to continue negotiations, because at the end of the day we are in it for the long run."

MIDDLEBURY,
HEAR OUR CALL,
FULL TRANSPARENCY
FOR ALL!

COURTESY PHOTO/ CONATION PHOTOGRAPHY

Protestors during the May 3 March to Old Chapel calling for Middlebury to disclose its financial connections to the war in Gaza.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STAFF COUNCIL SURVEY SHOWS MIXED RESULTS AS COMPENSATION ISSUES PERSIST

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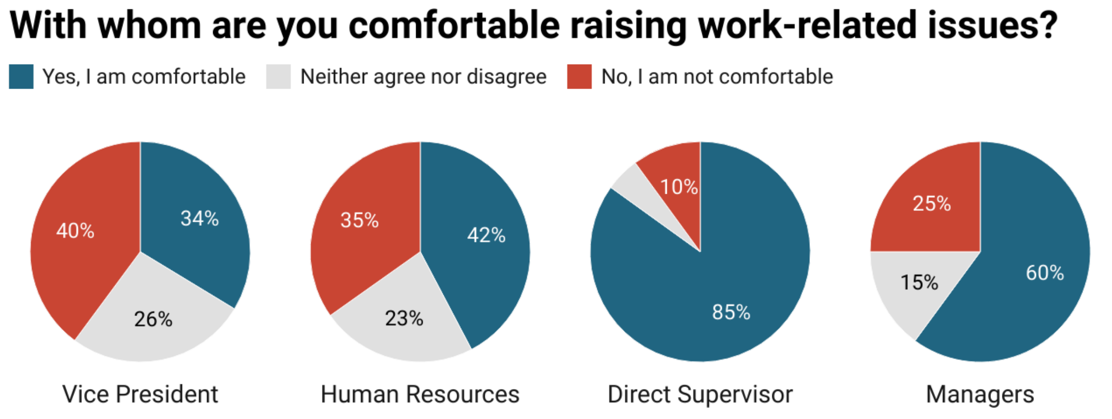


Data for "Neither" and "Disagree" in the Direct Supervisor question was rounded to the closest available figures

RYAN MCELROY / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

compensation issues continue to compound for employees: 45.5% of respondents agreed with the statement "I find I need a second source of income to make ends meet." This number is consistent with past figures; the 2021 survey found 46% needed additional sources of income.

"Although I am fairly compensated for my work, the cost of living is so high that it just barely covers my monthly expenses," one employee wrote in an anonymous quote highlighted by the Staff Council's presentation.

A livable hourly wage in Addison County for a single adult with no children is $23.30, according to the MIT Living Wage Calculator; the college's minimum hourly wage as of July 1, 2024 is $18.19, an increase of $0.59 cents from the previous fiscal year, according to Middlebury Human Resources. Even with moderate increases in base pay in recent years, employees continue to report struggling to get by in Addison County on a single income from Middlebury.

"Despite having a Master's Degree and being in the field for [many] years, my salary compensation is quite below what is sustainable for me and my family. I stay because of the amazing students and a few colleagues," another employee wrote in the survey. "The fact that the current cost of living in Addison County does not significantly increase all salaries is honestly startling and disrespectful to staff."

The Campus has previously reported that only 40% of those who work at the college live in the town of Middlebury, while over one in five staff members live further than 15 miles away from campus. Many employees make long commutes from outside Addison County or even Vermont to find affordable housing while working at Middlebury.

Staff also reported dissatisfaction with the current tiered compensation system, suggesting that the program has not yet been widely accepted since it debuted over two years ago in July 2022. Almost half of respondents disagreed with the statement "My job duties are accurately reflected by my pay grade / skill matrix placement," while a quarter somewhat agreed and only 12% strongly agreed.

"The matrix seems ok, but I struggle in my department with the placement of positions in the grade," one person wrote, referring to the classifications of "learning," "growing," "thriving" or "leading," which are assigned by work supervisors and correspond to pay rates as set by broader market comparisons. The skill matrix has affected staffing in numerous departments, including Davis Family Library, where seven librarians have left in the past two years, with some citing the lack of career progression and stagnant wages.

Thomas believes that while the compensation system still has both supporters and critics, the survey demonstrated a better understanding of how the system works compared to when it was first introduced over two years ago.

"One of the things that we were glad to see and were able to report is some of the work that HR had done this past year to implement more training with supervisors about how to use the skill matrix and to minimize some of the misunderstandings about how the skill matrix could be used," Thomas said. "But it's definitely still a pain point for a lot of people that they would like to see more opportunity for growth and development in the organization and for higher salaries."

Thomas shared that the survey data will help inform the Staff Council's agenda this year, including how it will address concerns raised by employees. She cited one recent area of improvement as proof of the council's impact on compensation issues.

"Last year Staff Council coordinated with Human Resources to shift differential pay adjustment that really benefited quite a few people, mostly on the college campus, but also some in other parts of the broad Middlebury, to help with those that — due to the nature of their job — have to work evenings, have to work weekends, have to work holidays," she explained, adding that the change was requested in several departments and helps recruit and retain hourly staff.

One bright spot for the college's compensation system continued to be the benefits package, which over 85% of staff respondents somewhat or strongly agreed was satisfactory.

For other respondents, however, the benefits such as health, dental and vision insurance and retirement savings for eligible employees did not fully compensate for greater disappointment in wages.

"The benefits are great but the pay is not adequate for my job duties," another respondent wrote.

Treatment and Workload

Seventy-five percent of respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that they are "generally treated fairly" at Middlebury, with less than 20% believing that they are not treated fairly at the college. Still, certain respondents noted the discrepancy in treatment by different members of the college community.

"While I do feel as though I am treated fairly, it is important to note that is among staff, not faculty. That divide is inconsistent and inequitable," one employee wrote.

The survey demonstrated that many other staff members share concerns about the workload and its distribution among employees. Fifty-four percent of respondents said their department does not have adequate staffing to meet its goals, while only 31% said their office had enough people to do so. Twenty-seven percent indicated their workload was not reasonable, while 38% somewhat agreed and 17% strongly agreed it was reasonable.

"I'm increasingly spending more and more time outside of normal working hours trying to catch up on all of my work. While some overtime is to be expected once in a while, this is becoming a more regular occurrence," one staff member wrote in the survey.

Over 84% strongly or somewhat agreed that their supervisor supported maintaining a work-life balance, although only 52% of respondents said they could complete all their tasks during normal work hours, with 36% saying they could not do so, and 12% neither agreeing or disagreeing with the question.

Professional Development

Professional development and advancement reported mixed results. A majority of staff members felt they received the support they needed to succeed and also indicated that their supervisor played an active role in their development. However, 23% strongly disagreed with the statement "I have opportunities for career advancement," while 24% somewhat disagreed, and 34% somewhat or strongly agreed.

Recognition

Recognition for their work was another area of mixed results for staff. While an outright majority indicated that the internal recognition and awards programs were not meaningful to them, over 80% of college employees reported that their supervisors and co-workers knew what they did in their roles.

Results for administrators were more mixed. Just two in five respondents indicated feeling that their vice president knew what they did for work. Over a quarter of employees neither agreed nor disagreed as to whether or not their department's vice president knew their work, expressing uncertainty about their connections to the highest level of Middlebury's leadership.

"I have no idea if our VP knows what I do!" one employee wrote, adding that their department has still not hired enough people to return to its pre-pandemic size, which impacts its ability to be proactive. "This campus does not have the luxury of 'working smart.'"

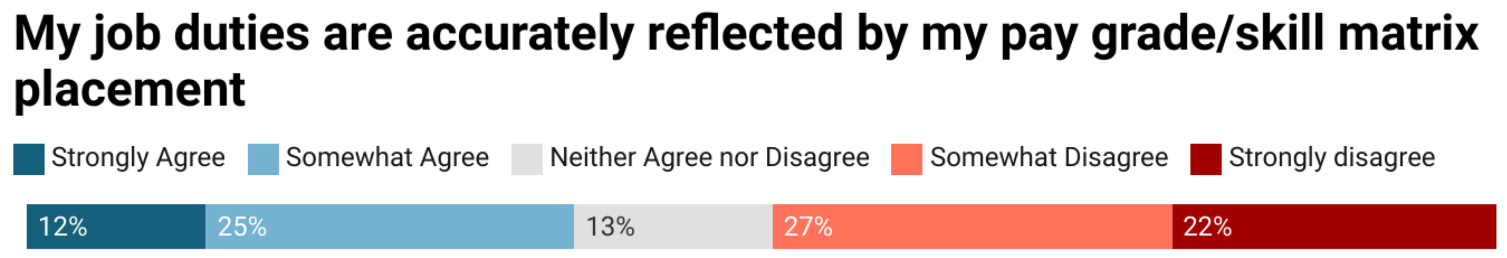
The relationship between employees and their direct leaders at the college appears to be much stronger than the connection between staff members and college leadership. Over 85% of respondents felt comfortable raising work-related issues with direct supervisors. However, 35% said they were not comfortable doing so with Human Resources, and 40% — a plurality — said the same about their vice president.

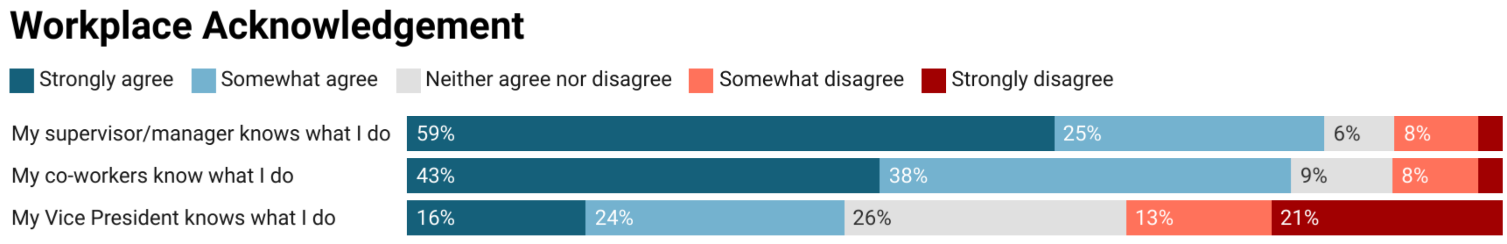
Overall satisfaction

Seventy-five percent of staff respondents reported that they strongly or somewhat agreed with being satisfied with their job at Middlebury. This proportion is higher than it was in 2021 — at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic — when only two-thirds of employees were happy in their jobs. Still, this year's satisfaction level remains six percentage points below that recorded in 2016.

Eighty-seven percent of respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that they are "proud to be part of this institution," while three-quarters agreed that "all things considered, this was a great place to work." These responses increased by 15 and 10 percentage points, respectively, compared to the last survey, which found decreased morale amidst the Covid-19 pandemic in September 2021.

"I have worked here a long time. I have seen the climate for staff be much worse. But also much better," one staff member wrote.





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RYAN MCELROY / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

College Street stabbing case holds hearing

Continued from Page 1

28 — seven days after the attack — Hoffman's attorney Gratton had requested for Hoffman to receive a mental competency exam. As a result, the hearing was postponed.

A status conference, in which major evidence to support Hoffman's plea could be presented, was then set for June 21. However, the State of Vermont v. Jerry Hoffman hearing was then rescheduled to Oct. 7 as a competency hearing, a court proceeding that determines whether a defendant is mentally able to stand trial.

Apart from the hearing and the police records filed to the court in March and April, an update on Sept. 13, 2024 included the Vermont Forensic Laboratory's most recent test report, according to court records from the Vermont Judiciary. The test result shows the DNA sample found on the knife, which was discovered at Hoffman's dwelling the day after the stabbing, matched that of Tran's.

During the competency hearing this week, Gratton put forward a new request for obtaining a sanity assessment for Hoffman, asking the court to consider his mental state at the time of the incident.

While the idea of competency relates to the defendant's state of mind at the time of the trial, sanity refers to the defendant's state of mind at the time of the offense, according to the American Psychological Association. To request a sanity assessment is to seek a determination of the potential presence of mental illnesses or defects when the crime was committed.

According to the Vermont State Law Sec. 1. 13 V.S.A. § 4801, "A person is not responsible for criminal conduct if at the time of such conduct as a result of mental disease or defect the person lacks adequate capacity either to appreciate the criminality of the person's conduct or to conform the person's conduct to the requirements of law."

Generally, the defendant should be interviewed as soon as possible after the offense, since early evaluation reduces the likelihood of misjudgments due to lack of evidence or unconscious distortion of memory. However, in many cases, defendants are often evaluated many months after the offense.

The defendant should provide a psychiatric history, including inquiries into the nature of hallucinations, delusions and past treatment efforts. The psychiatrist should also request a detailed account of the crime. It is useful for evaluations to trace the defendant's step-by-step account of his or her actions beginning one or two days before the offense. The account should include details on psychiatric symptoms, medication adherence and use of intoxicants.

For sanity assessments, the defendant usually reaches out to an external forensic assessment agency with licensed psychiatrists for the service. Forensic psychiatrists then follow a a standard evaluation process to assess the defendant's sanity at the time of the crime. This process analyzes factors such as their demonstrated knowledge that they committed a crime — such as whether they hid evidence or fled the crime scene — and of the rationality of their possible motives.

According to Vermont State laws, the Office of the Defender General shall pay for the evaluation of an indigent defendant. Gratton noted to the judge during the hearing that the current expense for obtaining an assessment can be high.

The hearing concluded with the court allowing another 30 days for Hoffman and his attorney to arrange for a sanity assessment in order to stipulate a timeline for a forthcoming trial, dates to be determined. The next hearing is scheduled for Nov. 4, 2024 at 9 a.m. at the Addison County District Court.

FORMER POLICE CHIEF ASSUMES ROLE AS INTERIM TOWN MANAGER

By MANDY BERGHELA
Senior Local Editor

On Sept. 23, the town of Middlebury welcomed back a familiar face to take over as the interim town manager.

Tom Hanley — who retired in February 2024 from his 32 years in service to the Middlebury Police Department as police chief — took over the chief executive officer position after former Town Manager Kathleen Ramsey stepped down after serving for 12 years. Ramsey will move on to serve as the municipal operations specialist for the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT), which helps those affected by flooding recover.

In an interview with The Campus, Hanley expressed that he is honored to have been appointed to the position.

"I have lived here for 33, 34 years, and I love it here," Hanley said. "When they asked me to come out of retirement to serve in this position, I was happy to do it."

Hanley has had a substantial career. He served as the detective sergeant for the police department in Wallingford, Conn. beginning in 1974 before moving to Middlebury in 1991 to work for the Middlebury Police Department. He added that during his time as police chief, he has maintained a great relationship with the college, something he hopes to maintain in his role as interim town manager.

Mandy Berghela / The Middlebury Campus
Former Middlebury town police chief Tom Hanley assumes role as interim town manager as selectboard finalizes permanent pick.

"We have done a lot for students," Hanley said. "Whether it be filming a movie, or doing research, we were always able to, as a department, be able to provide them with what they needed. We have valued our relationship with the college and we still do."

The town manager is responsible for governing over multiple town departments and signing off on planning decisions within the town, concerning departments including the police, fire, planning, parks, finance, water and wastewater.

The person in this central role is often seen as the public face of the town, frequently attending local events in lieu of a mayoral figure. They are responsible for engaging with residents, listening to their concerns and identifying key issues to present at selectboard meetings. The Selectboard serves as the town's legislative body and consists of elected members from around the community.

In an email to The Campus, Selectboard Member Andy Hooper explained the purpose of the board as opposed to the town manager role.

"We are the elected leaders who appoint the residents to the required (planning commission, development review board) and optional (energy committee, etc.) groups within the town government. We approve grants and project priorities (which are generally set by, in this case, the infrastructure committee), and we are one of the main contact points for the public with the town," Hooper wrote.

The Selectboard is also responsible for appointing the next permanent town manager. The process is rather long, beginning with a selection of potential candidates listed by Ramsey prior to her vacating the position. The candidates are then vetted out by the Personnel Committee on the Selectboard until the entirety of the board comes together for the final round of interviews.

"Candidates presented on a topic of their choice and their views of the largest issues facing Middlebury and what the options and best solutions were," Hooper wrote. "The overall goal for the select board is to make sure that we have continuity in excellent leadership that earns/keeps the trust of the town residents, the town employees and the select board."

The town can expect an announcement of the new town manager within the next week, according to Hooper, with the goal of having them start their role by the next year. Hanley will serve as interim town manager until the new permanent manager begins.

A top priority for Hanley, as well as for the future town manager, will be addressing the housing crisis, given the shortage in Middlebury and across Vermont. Housing was the central theme of this year's Clifford Symposium at the college.

"Our major employers [the college, hospital, public schools, etc.] can't attract necessary employees because there is so little housing available, and what there is is so expensive," Hooper wrote. "There are a lot of people who commute from New York state to jobs in Middlebury, and it would be better for them (and for the planet) if we could provide affordable housing and allow them to live closer to their work."

Another major issue that will be important for the town manager to address is the aging infrastructure of the town and the necessary costs that will go into making repairs.

"We have many infrastructure issues," Hanley said. "We have a wastewater treatment that needs about $50,000,000 worth of upgrades and a water treatment plant that also needs some substantial upgrades."

Despite the issues that will demand the attention of the interim town manager and eventual full-time hire, Hanley is grateful to serve for his community once again as the new town manager settles in.

"Middlebury is a wonderful place," Hanley said. "I wouldn't want to live anywhere else."

Cricket Blue and the Champlain Philharmonic Orchestra set to perform at Middlebury Town Hall

By VIOLET WEXLER
Contributing Writer

On Saturday, Oct. 12, Cricket Blue, the folk duo composed of Middlebury alumni Taylor Smith '12 and Laura Heaberlin '12.5, will return to Middlebury for a show with the Champlain Philharmonic Orchestra at the Town Hall Theater. The duo will perform orchestral renditions of their debut album, "Serotinalia." They will also perform a second show with the Champlain Philharmonic in Rutland, Vt. on Oct. 13.

Released in 2019, "Serotinalia" includes 11 original songs, one of which is an almost 12-minute ballad titled "Corn King." The album's music follows unique characters set in a fictional world imagined by Smith and Heaberlin. Cricket Blue has gained recognition for its "fiction-folk" style, with The All Scene Eye blog praising the duo for "setting a new standard" in the genre and NPR Music calling them "master storytellers." Heaberlin's songwriting has also been featured on The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon. In 2020, the duo also created a YouTube series in which they covered songs from the "Over the Garden Wall" soundtrack.

Luke Awtry / The Middlebury Campus
Taylor Smith '12 (Left) and Laura Heaberlin '12.5 (Right) of Cricket Blue return to Middlebury to perform orchestral renditions of their debut album, Serotinalia at the Town Hall Theater.

The collaboration with the Champlain Philharmonic will be Cricket Blue's first time working with a full symphony orchestra. Matt LaRocca '02, the musical director of the Champlain Philharmonic Orchestra, proposed the collaboration after becoming familiar with the duo through the Burlington music scene. Once the collaboration was confirmed, LaRocca rearranged the folk songs into full orchestral arrangements.

"It's hard to do these types of collaborations regularly just because paying that many musicians can get pretty expensive. So we never dreamed that we would hire a whole symphony. And so this opportunity is really cool that they approached us and wanted to work with us," Heaberlin said.

Smith and Heaberlin first met at Middlebury as part of the Middlebury Mamajamas, an a capella group on campus. Their experience arranging and performing for the group, along with their leadership roles within it, laid the groundwork for their musical partnership.

"We both did a lot of arranging for the group and I feel, yes, singing together for so long, but also just managing the group, because we both were in leadership roles for Mamajamas," Heaberlin said. "I feel like that was all kind of a precursor for being in a band together."

Smith used the open music studio and learned how to formally record his music. Their musical knowledge from a cappella and other events at the college inspired Smith and Heaberlin to consider pursuing music as their career.

The two musicians follow a unique songwriting process, navigating their music collaboratively. When one person has an idea for a song, they send the first draft version to the other, who returns it with color-coded notes.

"It is rare that we have a really substantial, unresolvable creative difference. We've been revising together for so long that even when I'm writing a first draft, I have Taylor's voice in my head saying, 'This is too repetitive,'" Heaberlin said. "I feel like we both have kind of come together into a style that we're already both excited about."

Cricket Blue is currently working on their newest album, which will be almost double the length of "Serotinalia," featuring approximately 20 tracks. The duo also hopes to create a more cohesive narrative throughout the album.

"[We are] exploring these different world views about how we think death and life work. And so it's kind of like an arc. It's more connective than our last album. So it feels more intentional than our last album in terms of world building," Heaberlin said.

Smith and Heaberlin explained that the musical variety is broader on this album as well, including new instruments such as drums or electric guitar on some of the tracks. While there is not a set release date for their second album, fans can expect to hear it in the near future.

"I was in a pit for things in the town hall theater while I was at Middlebury, and it'll be fun to be back there again. It's been a long time," Smith said.

Tickets for the performance are available to purchase on the Middlebury Town Hall's website, with a discounted price available for students.

IN DEFENSE OF BANNING SCREENS

Op-Ed

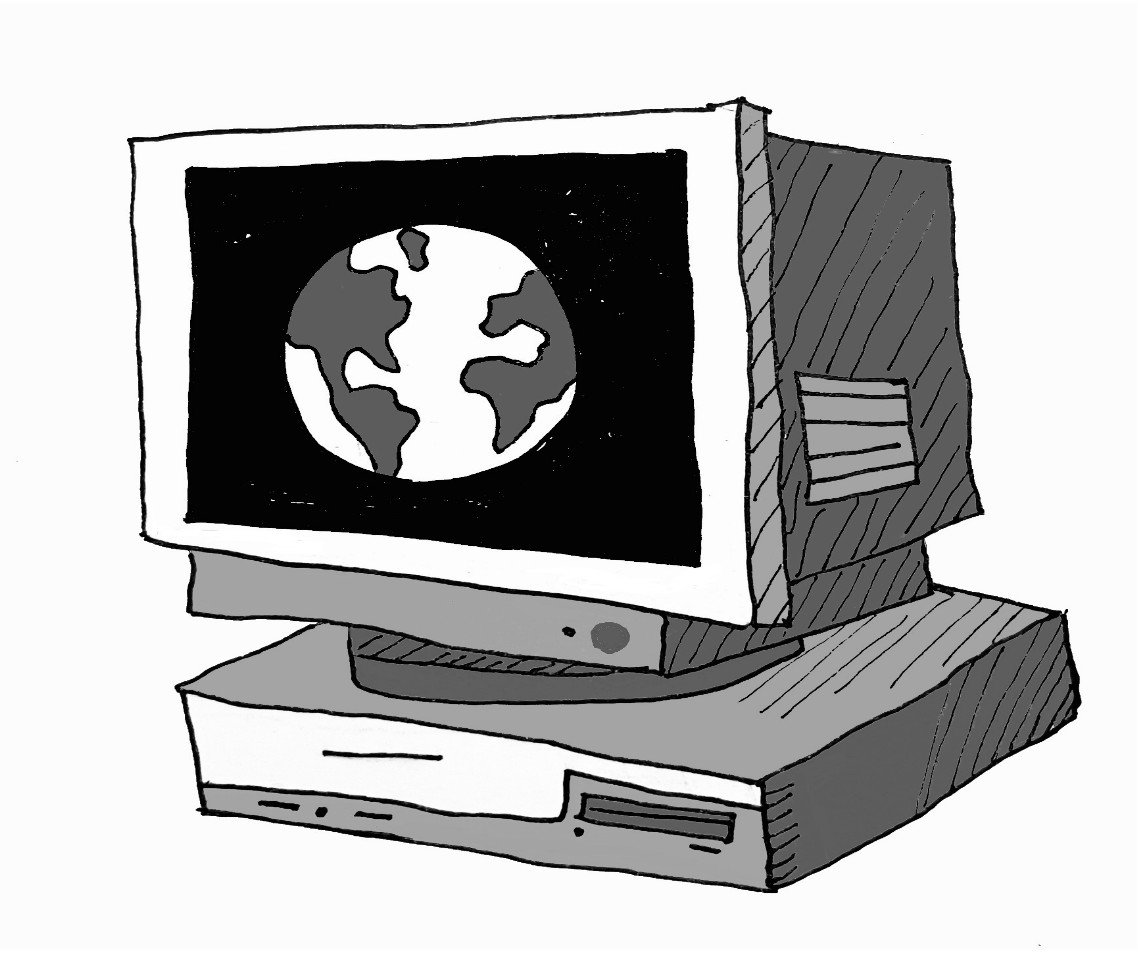
Daniel Allen *is a member of the class of 2024.5.*

Almost all of us would do better in class if we took notes on paper and did our readings from physical books. I will be the first to admit it: I love to take notes with my laptop in class. It stores them all in one place, I do not have to worry about deciphering my writing after the fact and it means fewer things to lug around and keep organized. Heck, I like the (obnoxious) click-clack noise my keyboard makes. Best of all, when lectures get boring, I can check my email, message my friends — maybe even work on another assignment. It's all about efficiency, right?

So imagine my frustration when, this semester, my political science course "How to Win the Argument" not only required the purchase of physical books for class, but also banned technology outright. That's right, no iPads for note taking, no laptops to follow the readings, no nothing. Had we gone back to the Paleolithic Era?

The first few days were difficult. I had not written with a pen in a long time, so my notes looked more like a doctor's prescription. There was an urge to check up on other things: What if I got an important email? Had I forgotten about an assignment? What time did class end again? I won't lie: It was uncomfortable. Though, much like a muscle that has been disused, that discomfort was a sign of positive change. Soon, I figured out that bemoaning my condition did little to help me. Indeed, there was a cure for this boredom and restlessness: following the lecture itself. I forced my attention towards class. It grieves me to say this: It was so much better.

I left the classroom more engaged and with a deeper appreciation for the content than I previously had. The lack of technology was not just beneficial for me, but also for the wider class dynamic. Students were not able to slink into silence, shielded behind their Macbooks. Classroom discussions were livelier, and the debates between students usually resolved into a consensus. In short, there was a palpable interest in the subject at hand — something that I often find sorely missing in my other classes. When I wrote an essay for my class, I discovered I consulted notes that, for once, were truly useful. Even more surprising, I found I needed to reference them less altogether because the content itself was already lodged in my head.



Skiles Roberts-Salvador / The Middlebury Campus

This is not unique to me. Countless studies show that taking physical notes in classrooms aids learning and concentration. The mere act of putting pen to paper commits content to memory in a manner that typing simply does not. For all its lauded efficiency, electronic note-taking fails to do one thing effectively: make you remember. Students seem to know this truth already. From a random student sample I conducted, drawing on a pool of 65 people, 73% answered that they could concentrate better in class without technology, while 20% answered it aided them, and six percent said it made no difference.

While I have fallen in love with leaving my laptop behind for class, I am not arguing for an indiscriminate ban on technology in the classroom. With subjects that center the use of computers (such as Computer Science courses), of course the laptop is necessary. Though even here, their necessity does not detract from their distraction. My friend Liz Bowen '24.5, a Computer Science major, shared that students' attention in her classes often strays from the instructed content to games, such as electronic chess, on their devices.

If a student has accommodations to use technology in the classroom, they should absolutely be encouraged to do so. More broadly, when it comes to assignments, I believe that technology can help the research and drafting process. But when we are in the classroom, we should maximize our attention spans. For the majority of us, that means no screens. The end goal for everyone is learning, not dogmatic anti-technologism.

At the end of the day, most courses offered at Middlebury are lecture or discussion-based and do not require the use of computers. Being an active and engaged learner requires a high level of focus on the material, which can be challenged by the attractive distractions of the internet or other applications. While this transition might be uncomfortable at first, I believe our student body would overwhelmingly benefit from taking notes and reading from papers almost exclusively.

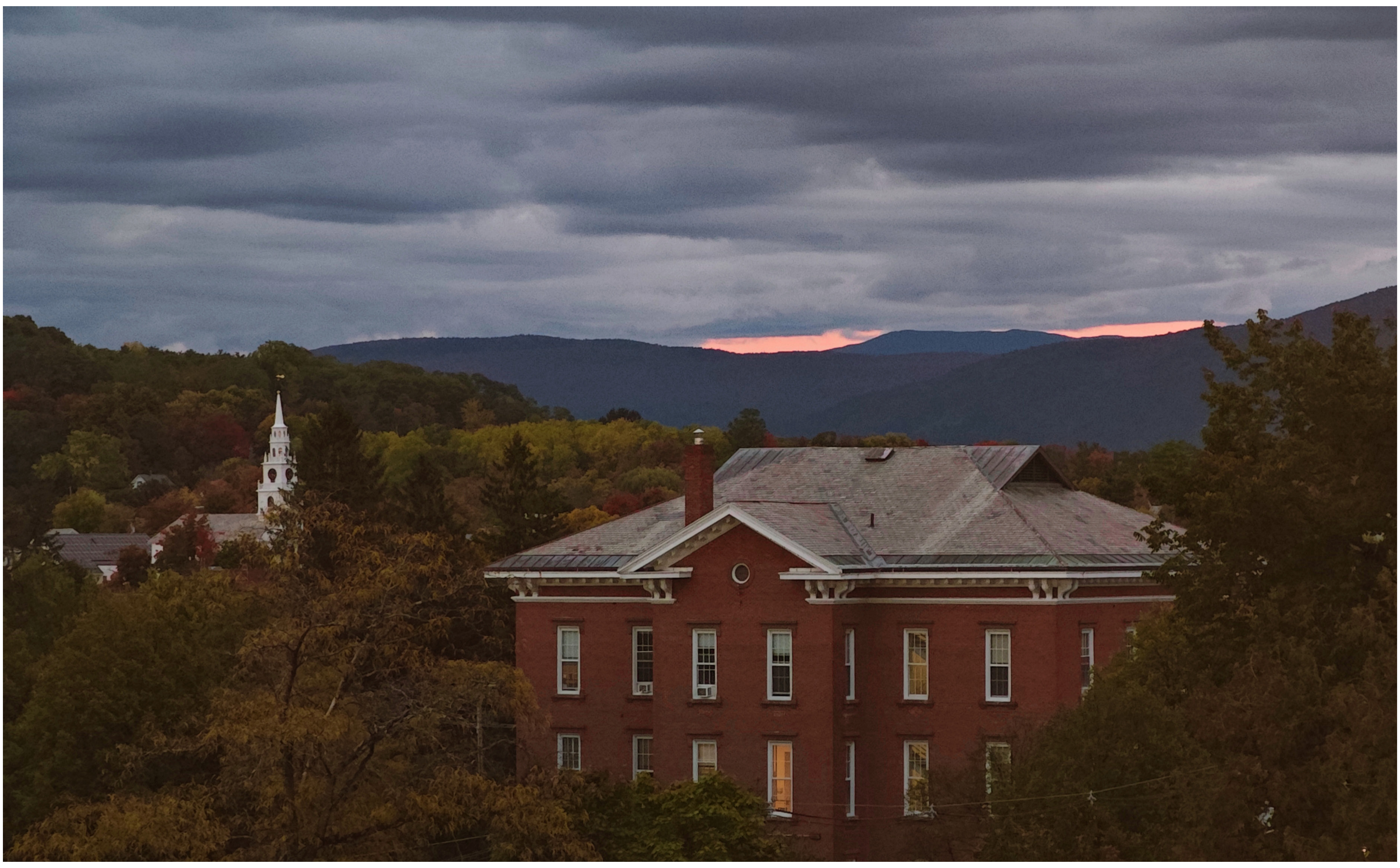
Does this mean that every student should print out each reading ahead of class and load up on new books in a frenzy each semester? No! I believe that the student body deserves massive institutional support for physical materials such as readings and books. Supposedly there is a program underway to implement just that, but Middlebury is notorious for the widening chasm between "coming soon" and "arrived." The college should work with students and professors to ensure that most of the books we require every semester are available for free; students should be able to borrow books on a semester basis and give them back to the institution for the next round. As if to prove this very point, I discovered that the Middlebury Davis Family Library currently only owns a single physical copy of "The Art of Rhetoric" by Aristotle, and it has been checked out until January 2025, leaving every other student in the Classics, English, Political Science, (you name it) departments to either get a digital copy or buy one for themselves. This is absurd. Knowledge should be free, easily accessible, usable and shared.

As uncomfortable as this switch might be for us, discomfort and the good are not mutually exclusive. I can admit that I do not have the necessary self-control to pay attention exclusively to my lectures if there is a computer in front of me. Social media and highly addictive technology are often the culprits of this deficiency. So why perpetuate these ills in the classroom if we have the opportunity to learn new habits?

PHOTO OF THE WEEK:

Twilight over Twilight

Delphine Wu '28 captured a gloomy autumn evening over Twilight Hall, with autumnal colors in full display. On Oct. 10 through Oct. 16, the Green Mountain State will be flushed with warm foliage, when the changing of the leaves is expected to crest before subsiding into late October and November.



Delphine Wu / Courtesy Photo

FALL-ING INTO PLACE: OUR INS AND OUTS THIS SEASON

Editorial

The editorial represents the opinion of the Middlebury Campus Editorial Board.

With the brisk mornings and bright foliage of autumn finally sweeping across campus this week, we wanted to reflect on the most memorable parts of the season and what parts of life we could really do without. Your personal fall ins and outs list may look different, but we hope this provides some inspiration for what we'll keep around for the rest of the year and what will be swept away like the many leaves now dotting our lawns. Whether this is your first or last fall at Middlebury, there is always time for self-reflection and growth.

Out: Disrespecting personal space

We are all busy people and have many tasks to complete in a day. However, let's remember to keep people's boundaries in mind and not waste each other's time. Whether this looks like gossiping with friends while standing in front of food in Proctor or abusing shared spaces like communal bathrooms and the quiet floors in Davis, we need to leave these disrespectful actions behind.

These annoyances, while ranging from trivial to legitimately irritating, can easily make someone's bad day that much worse, especially once the colder weather and shorter days begin to set in. Be aware of your surroundings and please, if someone politely asks you to move, help them out.

In: Bringing some fun and flavor to college life

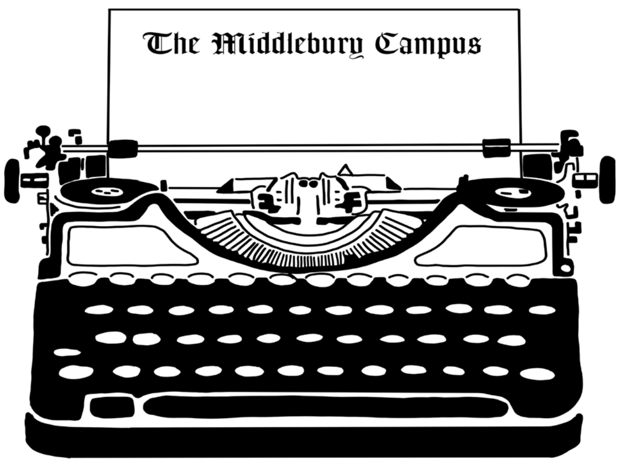
Our first "in" is learning more about each other's quirks and embracing the spontaneity of college life. We hope to see more of our professors interrupt lectures by sharing cool stories and anecdotes, and students helping them do so by asking how their professors' weekends were on Mondays. We appreciate Kathy's Proc games as a fun way to spice up the dining hall experience, as well as the variety of random academic lectures and fun stress-busters sponsored by various organizations. We call for students to keep embracing the unique aspects of this college that break up the daily routine and make it a unique place to live.

Out: Superficiality

Asking the name of a person you've already met many times over is out — at least have the decency to ask a mutual friend for their name if you've managed to forget. Small talk without genuine interest in the person across from you by circumstance in the dining hall or walking to your next class is also out. Instead, seek out meaningful new relationships. That could mean setting up a weekly lunch date with an acquaintance you'd like to know better, or reconnecting with an old friend for a walk outside. Honesty and open communication are much better than vague pleasantries.

In: Being kind and dedicated to your friends

On a similar note, be generous and care for those who care for you. Engage in meaningful acts of dedication that demonstrate intentionality and a lived interest in the relationship. This could be small — offering to fill someone else's water bottle when you're about to fill yours during a busy time in the dining hall or in the library — or more involved, like dedicating time to talk about their emotions or writing someone a heartfelt, handwritten note.



SUSANNA SCHATZ

Out: Being distracted in class

We've all seen it in lectures: Someone's playing The New York Times Spelling Bee game in class, the person next to them is watching YouTube or setting their fantasy football lineup in a lecture hall, and everyone in the back row is clothes shopping.

These people are absorbing nothing of what their professors are saying, mind-numbingly distracted under the disguise of a laptop notetaker. Unfortunately, these habits detract not only from their own educational experience, but from that of everyone sitting behind them, who can't help but avert their attention from class instruction to judge their peers based on their Wordle trials and errors.

There are so many more hours in the day when these activities are appropriate, but engaging in them while in class is unacceptable.

In: All things autumn

This one's obvious. We're excited for shorter and cooler days, sweaters, boots, Knoll harvests and taking in the foliage. We happily anticipate the perennially creative and unpredictable Halloween costumes of Midd Kids and the seasonal decor that spreads throughout town. There's no better place to spend the fall than in Vermont, and we welcome it with open, flanneled arms.

We'll leave you with some of our parting thoughts on smaller, sillier parts of life that we enjoy or could do without, in no particular order.

In: Berries at breakfast in the dining halls; voting; NYT games (just not in class); college-funded subscriptions to major newspapers such The Atlantic and The Wall Street Journal; liking and commenting on friends' Venmo transactions; nickels; coordinating a cool outfit for class; on-campus arts events; and class crushes.

Out: Wasps swarming you while eating outside; pennies; stealing drinks from fridges at parties; and making unnecessary and abstract noises in class.

"Boycott, Divest, Sanction" is not the answer

Op-Ed

Claire Shapiro *is a member of the class of 2024.5 and Senior Opinions Editor at The Campus.*

"In the arsenal of diplomacy, economic sanctions are crude weapons, slow-acting and unpredictable. When they work, innocents suffer. The bad guys, after all, are usually the ones with the bunkers and gas masks — or, in this case, the power and cash — to endure a war of attrition."

So contends Bill Keller, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, former Executive Editor of The New York Times and, most pertinently, the newspaper's Bureau Chief in Johannesburg from 1992 to 1995. His essential critique has not lost its resonance. Last spring, echoing the many voices of fellow undergraduate protesters in support of the Boycott, Divest, Sanction (BDS) movement, the Middlebury student body widely endorsed divestment of the college's endowment in response to the war in Gaza. Contrary to this position, I hold that BDS — an effective way to socially stigmatize an industry or government, but not to generate economic or political change — would constitute a ham-handed, inexpedient form of institutional opposition to the conflict. I begin by enumerating the reasons why rapid divestment of the endowment, as well as investment transparency, would not be possible before demonstrating that, even if investors were to rapidly and broadly divest from the Israeli government and Israeli businesses, this approach would fail to meaningfully weaken these entities but instead would almost certainly hurt the poorest, most vulnerable Israelis — and Palestinians.

Calls for Middlebury to divest parts of its endowment and become financially transparent rest on a fundamental misunderstanding of what the process of investing and divesting a university endowment looks like. Because Middlebury's portfolio is largely made up of long-run, illiquid private market investments, it usually cannot sell investments prematurely without significant losses, and often cannot sell them prematurely at all. This is why the college necessarily takes so long to divest. And, unlike in the case of divestment from fossil fuels — a process which will take the college 15 years — waiting decades for divestment in response to a current conflict would render such action rather moot. Moreover, total financial transparency would be impossible given that Investure, the investment management firm Middlebury utilizes, sometimes "enters into confidentiality or 'standstill' agreements," "acquire[s] confidential information" and "obtain[s] access to material nonpublic information." Constant transparency, too, would be impossible given that Middlebury invests so heavily in private markets which report only on a semi-annual basis. A transition to financial transparency would be a wildly and rightfully unprecedented tack which would inevitably lose the college millions of dollars. It is abundantly clear that transparency would not benefit Gazans but would only limit Middlebury's ability to provide for financial aid, staff wages and other necessary expenditures.

Perhaps more compelling, however, is the issue that even the goal — to be a part of a large wave of divestment, sanctioning and financial boycotting — would not generate the outcome that Middlebury students want. U.S. sanctions, for example, have only produced the desired effect in 13% of cases since 1970. In Iran, Afghanistan, Venezuela and South Africa, to name just a few of the many nations against which the United States has imposed sanctions in recent decades, these measures have economically strangled the poor while causing far less harm to the intended targets (namely, the Iranian government, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Taliban, Maduro administration and National Party). In a 2014 resolution, The Human Rights Council of the United Nations declared itself "alarmed by the disproportionate and indiscriminate human costs of unilateral sanctions" — a warning we cannot allow ourselves to forget or ignore. In the Gaza Strip, where unemployment rates frequently exceed 50% even in peacetime and the poverty rate, as of October 2023, was over 80%, sanctions would undoubtedly prove lethal for many. Likewise, divestment and economic boycotting rarely have the intended impact. In order to sell stock, of course, there must be a buyer; that divested stock does not merely evaporate. With millions of global investors, many of whom are relatively unscrupulous with regard to financial decision-making, investments that are sloughed off on moral grounds are then merely picked up by less morally motivated agents, who then take on the power and influence that comes with owning stock in a company.

RYAN MCELROY/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Student protestors from the Gaza Solidarity encampment marched to Old Chapel on May 3, 2024 to demand the college divest from war profiteering.

Thus, while I agree with the authors of last spring's Student Government Association Referendum in that "money is power," I ask you to consider whose power — and whose stockpiles — would actually dwindle if Israel were to be widely sanctioned, boycotted and targeted by divestment campaigns. The preponderance of evidence suggests that it would not be the Israeli government, Israel Defence Forces or major corporations with ties to Israel who would be most impacted by BDS; rather, it would be the destitute and the feeble whose stockpiles would dry up and the power of morally-minded investors which would be abdicated.

The Middlebury Campus

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SYMPATHIZING WITH SUBSTACK

By CATHERINE GOODRICH
Senior Arts & Culture Editor

I harbor the fantasy that one day my phone will be constructive to my well-being. As our digital and physical spheres become more inseparable and more imaginative, forgoing technology altogether seems disadvantageous. So with a hopeful heart, I've made various attempts at using technology to encourage my interests rather than distract from them; over the years this has meant an imperfect cycle of deleting and redownloading. My most recent renovation has been shifting my attention from Twitter to Substack, the online publishing platform that houses journalism, criticism, op-eds, blog-esque posts and everything in between.

The founding of Substack in 2017 and its growing popularity seem part and parcel of journalism's present struggle to sustain audience interest. As media companies try to keep up with an increasingly cheap and efficient content distribution market, they trip over themselves in a cycle of mergers and acquisitions that further alienates audiences. This aggregation continuously misunderstands the specific, personable and local appeal of content. It's saddening to have seen newspapers' circulation plunge over my lifetime, especially in small to mid-sized cities, as media conglomerates fail to fill the gaps these outlets leave behind. This shrinkage can hardly be attributed to a decline in good writers, however — writers who are reaching audiences on platforms like Substack.

On Substack, writers have the leeway to take on a public-facing role where their work goes directly to their subscriber's Substack inbox. It's a centralized site where readers can opt-in to receive what they deem worthy of their attention and where writers can engage with their audience through chat and notes features. Writers who publish to Substack have full editorial control over their work, which gives readers the sense that they're engaging with a person, not a corporation. It also helps readers, myself included, feel they are reading something singular, something that is authentically DIY.

Numerous Middlebury professors, students and alumni publish on Substack, including author and Assistant Professor of English, Megan Mayhew-Bergman who explores the relationship between person and place on her page, Open Field Stories.

"Many outlets which used to support deep long-form journalism have turned into homes for product placement puff pieces," wrote Mayhew-Bergman in a message to The Campus. "Being able to write with nuance and complexity and not create short clickbait pieces matters to me, and options for doing so are disappearing."

Mayhew-Bergman writes a regular newsletter via Substack, which she sees as a mutual exchange with readers on how the natural world, the climate crisis and sensory writing affect our personhood.

"At Substack, the burden is on you to create well and to publish work you're okay standing behind," Mayhew-Berman wrote. "I tend to publish twice a month. I have a healthy following, not a massive one - but I feel like I'm in a real conversation with my readers. I care about them. I'm moved when they support my work. I feel like we're joining forces to open up conversations about a degraded planet."

Associate Professor of Political Science Gary Winslett has been posting on Substack since 2021.

"Substack is very easy in that you don't need anybody's permission," said Winslett in an interview with The Campus. "One of the great things about both Twitter and Substack is that if you think you've got something to say you can go get an audience. And if people like what you're doing they'll share your work and increase your scale over time and every now and again you'll have something go big."

Winslett, who began his Substack "The Neoliberal Papers" in response to a perceived need for re-engaged center-left politics, has enjoyed success in pieces on the Vermont housing crisis and the divisive reputation of libertarianism. These articles' pertinence has managed to find circulation despite not being backed by a legacy news outlet or academic publication.

"If you feel like you have something to say in the public realm, you need to go somewhere outside of just academic journals," Winslett said. "The downside is that there is limited institutional reach — you're not going to get anybody's help in furthering the message and so there's a use for Substack but also a set of limitations."

For alumna and former Campus columnist Sarah Miller '24, Substack has been a forum to hone her craft and gain footing in the world of professional writing. She has found Substack to be a means of continuing her interest in the intersection of criticism and personal essay. Her page, "Promising Young Woman" is an astute examination of being 22 in the year 2024.

"There are very few publications that feel like they're both about ideas and also care about the individual prose of an argument, and I think that both of those things are really important to me, and that's why I'm working on Substack," Miller said in an interview with The Campus.

Substack's rise to prominence is also tied to a nostalgia for blogging. 2000s-era blogs offered a venue for writers to cultivate and publish their specific stylings, and Substack hopes to capitalize on the same personable appeal. These blogs with their color schemes, deliberate font choices and vibrant layouts mimic the feeling of the audience looking into a blogger's room, whereas, Substack's functional layout readers are given access to solely the author's notebook. Yet both are often faulted for being overly confessional and unserious: a glorified dispatch from the notes app.

"What's cool about Substack is that I feel very free to talk about my personal life and my feelings," Miller said. "It's not a diary for me because I have a diary, and that's different, but it's a way for my friends of mine who I don't see every day anymore to know what's going on in my life and what I'm thinking about. It's a cool way to keep in touch with people."

Courtesy Photo / Substack

Substack is not merely a newsletter for Miller's friends but a portfolio that is linked on her CV.

"I think Substack is a much more live and dynamic platform than a blog because there's a community of people on Substack reading Substack and people in the industry looking toward Substack," Miller said.

Winslett agreed, "I think they've done something really clever and figured out how to give everybody who wanted a blog a place to do that where they would actually have some reach and not just a random site no one traffics."

Substack, from a business standpoint, would love to have more subscribers traffic their site. Yet Substack's ethos as a community-oriented platform calls the organization's slogan, "Building a new economic engine for culture," into question. As a young company, Substack's legacy remains to be seen. Whether the brand can reconcile a profit-oriented sensibility with an indie-journalistic feel is a question that is relevant to our current media landscape and is keeping Substack on my home screen.

"Substack is fast and allows a writer to be responsive and on the pulse a little more," Mayhew-Bergman wrote. "At its worst, a lack of gatekeeping and fast publishing - both part of Substack's promise - contributes to America's opinion and misinformation culture. At its best, it allows a writer to be honest, present, and agile in a culture with a rapid-fire news cycle. The burden is on the writer to be solid with good intentions, and the reader to be discerning."

It's not a coincidence that the most evocative, inspired essays and articles I've read in recent years, I've found on Substack. Contributors to the platform are in an intermediate space somewhere between auteur and content creator — I hope that moving forward, we'll consider them neither. The most successful Substackers in my mind are writers with a specific angle who are free to lean into the role of author or influencer as they see fit. They often are a lyricist-analyst hybrid. To amass an audience amid the current content onslaught, these writers will need to carve out a niche that speaks to their personal tastes and experiences, and Substack currently offers the flexibility and affability required to chart the uncertain waters of modern media. It's my sincere hope that the platform continues to embolden a subscription to generative, noteworthy writing rather than sinking into the generalized trap of marketable content.

29TH ANNUAL FIRST YEAR SHOW ECHOES TRUTH OF IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

By NATHAN BERNAZZANI
Staff Writer

There is nothing quite like the feeling of sitting in a theater waiting for the curtain to rise, for the actors to emerge on stage and transport the audience to another world. That anticipation, the rustling of programs and the low chatter of friends and family eagerly awaiting the start of the show filled the Hepburn Zoo this past weekend as audiences came in to see the 29th annual First-Year Show.

Directed by Visiting Professor of Acting Ashley Baptiste, "Echoes of Truth" opened on Oct. 3 and finished its run on Oct. 5. The production saw nine first year students make their stage debut at Middlebury — some of whom had participated in their high school theater program, and others who were acting for the first time. No matter their backgrounds, the company of "Echoes of Truth" put their hearts and souls into the production. Their performances embodied the core question of the show: "Who are you?"

At the beginning of the semester, the cast embarked on a three-week process led by Baptiste to devise the show. This existential theme of "Echoes of Truth" was inspired by Baptiste's performance workshop series titled "I Am" which has been in development for a few years. With the main scenes having been carefully selected by Baptiste to highlight the performers' strengths, the cast was then left to create their own scene transitions. They wrote poems and monologues and chose what song(s) they wanted to underscore those moments. Each scene and transition had something to contribute to the show's themes of family, friends, self-expression and revelations of truth.

On Saturday afternoon, my curiosity was piqued by a minimal stage design. There were three white blocks in the center of the floor, a doorway and chairs lined up against both the left and right sides of the stage, which would later be used by the actors to watch their fellow castmates as both spectators and members of the company. Considering the Hepburn Zoo's close quarters and dimly lit ambiance, I knew I was in for a night of intimate and immersive theater.

The show began unexpectedly with no director's address to signify the transition into the world of the piece. Instead, the audience's attention was suddenly diverted from their pre-show conversions and phone scrolling by the sudden entrance of an actor from behind the black curtain backdrop. Moving slowly, she was soon followed by the rest of the cast, all of whom found an open space on stage, quickly filling out the small room. The lights shifted and a hum of music began to play — we had finally been transported into "Echoes of Truth."

The opening segment of the piece consisted of all nine actors swaying along to the music, performing a distinct action through flowing movement; making and throwing a snowball, fixing hair and clothes in a mirror and various karate positions, to name a few. The silence was broken when the actors, in roaring unison, spoke the words "I am." What followed was a ripple effect of each actor giving their own personal "I am" statements. This opening scene invited the audience to think about what their own statements might be.

The main scenes were a selection from "Almost Maine" by John Cariani, "Death Tax" by Lucas Hnath, "Be Aggressive" by Annie Weisman, "52nd to Bowery to Cobble Hill in Brooklyn" by Chiara Atik and "The Dream of the Burning Boy" by David West Read. These scenes varied greatly in terms of characters, storylines and context. Audience members were transported from the blossoming of young love to the grief of a mother trying to save her son to an awkward taxi ride between two new acquaintances and beyond. But whether comedy or drama, each scene had one clear element that tied them all together and justified their place in "Echoes of Truth": a revelation of someone or something. A truth uncovered.

The final moments of the show repeated the opening's music, movements and "I am" statements. However, after having seen the show in its entirety, this exercise carried a new weight. The audience was able to see how all these different elements were interwoven and, in the end, returned to the core question of who we are. This question of identity was the driving force of "Echoes of Truth" and was what stayed with me even hours after having left the theater.

"Echoes of Truth" is an exploration and revelation of self. What truths can reveal about us, what we can reveal about each other and what we, as individuals and as a community can reveal about the world is done by being authentically and truthfully, ourselves.

COURTESY PHOTO / ASHLEY BAPTISTE

The cast of "Echoes of Truth", which ran from Oct. 3 to Oct. 5.

Bala Bila unifies West and East African musical stylings in collaborative concert

By CHRISTY LIANG
Contributing Writer

On Friday, Oct. 4, Middlebury welcomed two renowned African musicians — Balla Kouyaté and Matchume Zango — for a night of musical wonder and communal merriment.

Balla Kouyaté is a virtuoso balafon player from Mali. His familial lineage dates back more than 800 years to Balla Faséké, whose descendants owned the world's first balafon made in the 13th century, now under UNESCO protection. Often billed as fusion, his music explores jazz and other outside influences while remaining consciously rooted in the Mandé tradition. He is a member of Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble, a community that has served as an inspiration to his current work. Teaching at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, Kouyaté closely collaborates with the college, where he has performed multiple times in the past two decades.

Matchume Zango, whose Oct. 4 performance marked his first concert in the United States, is a master timbila player born and raised in Mozambique. He is well known in the Southern African region for his spectacular timbila and dance shows and his many collaborations with international musicians. Zango recently completed a three-year project entitled Vasikate (meaning "women" in the Chopi language), which involved residencies and performances with female artists from Angola, Brazil, Guinea, Bissau and Mozambique.

The dynamic between the two musicians, who hail from East and West Africa respectively, was strong. They met not long ago, but quickly built an infectious rapport, which manifested in their on-stage interactions and the intimate interplay of their sounds.

Courtesy Photo / Mahaney Performing Arts Series
Balla Kouyaté and Matchume Zango, with their respective instruments.

"We had only begun rehearsing since mid-September, and we have to converse in English because Matchume speaks Portuguese and I speak French due to the different colonization histories of our countries," said Kouyaté in a post-performance conversation with The Campus. Despite the language barriers, the two musicians achieved a seamless communion through music, their sounds merging into a naturalistic and contemplative whole.

Before the musicians' entrance, background sounds of a waterfall and birdsong reverberated gently throughout the concert hall, which evoked a sense of naturalistic wonder that accompanies the conventional imagination of Africa. Blending fervent percussion with soulful chanting, Kouyaté and Zango conjured a musical harmony evocative of bygone longings, distant lands and the richness of earth. Besides one song, which, according to Kouyaté, was about the importance of young people harboring respect for the elders, the meanings behind the tunes were left to each listener's interpretation, amplifying the emotive impact of the music to its fullest. The instruments on stage were predominantly percussive, except for an electric guitar, which blended harmoniously with the other instruments.

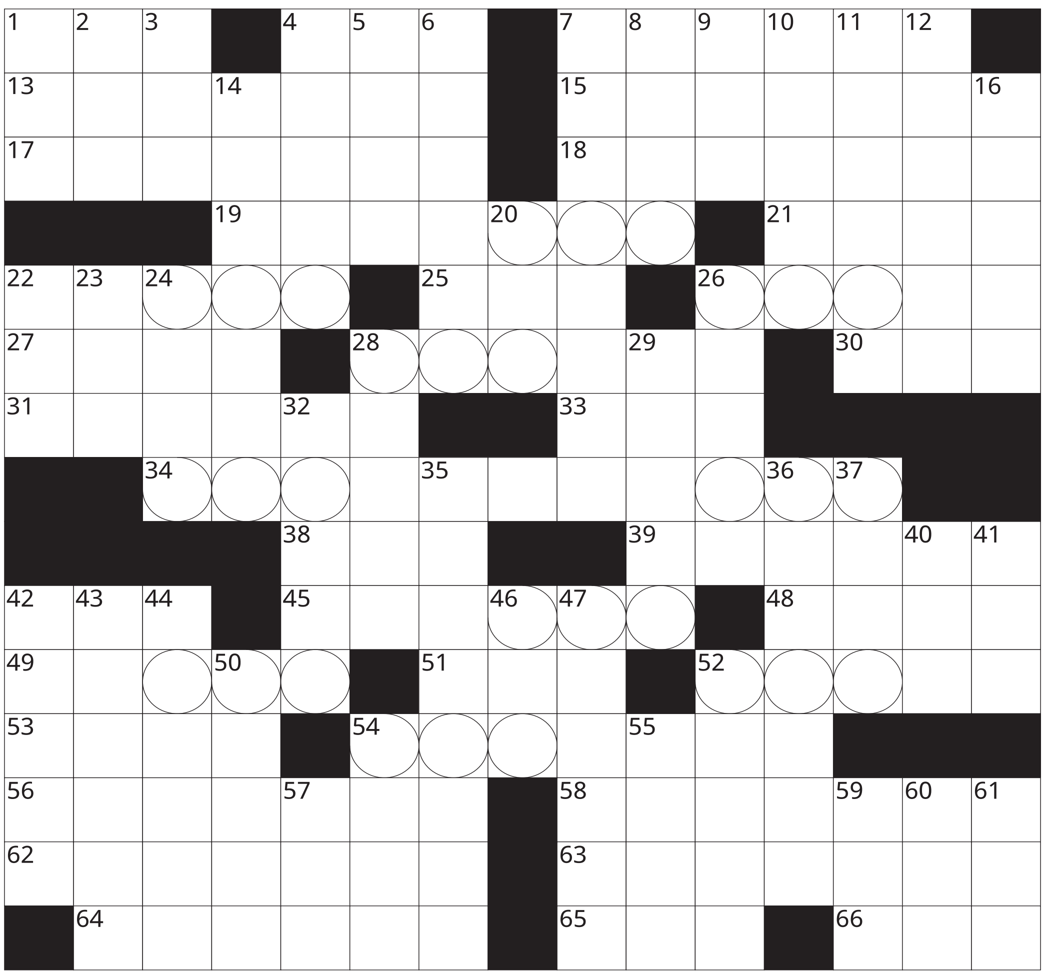
Bala Bila was also remarkable for its multimodality, adding a visual element to the musical performance. On a screen in the background, a documentary video played concurrently with the music, featuring scenes of life in Africa, from agricultural activities to tribal festivities. Seeing everyday life in Africa unfold in accompaniment to the music lent an anthropological dimension to this artistic experience. Zango told the audience that the video intends to draw attention to a rural lifestyle without electricity and, more importantly, climate change on the African continent.

"I had an amazing experience. Some of the tunes sounded familiar to me because Zimbabwe is adjacent to Mozambique. I am also familiar with the instruments, but the musicians' level of talent is just out-of-this-world," said Tatenda Mapungwana '28, who watched the performance. "What's even more amazing is seeing people from other cultures embracing and dancing to our cultural music. It shows that people appreciate different cultures, which is important in this world. I also felt connected to home through the visuals in the background featuring rural life in Africa, which brought back lots of memories," Mapungwana said.

Beyond merely sitting in wonder, the Bala Bila audience became part of the music by echoing Zango's singing and, during the last song, helping transform the concert hall into a massive dance party. Seeing people of all ages channel vibrant musicality through movement in a shared time and space was heartwarming. People clapped, sang and danced — it was a true testament to the unifying power of music.

Flirting Away

Egan Turner



ACROSS

1 Prefix for cycle or angle
4 K-pop septet
7 You can get in trouble for dropping them
13 Apple wireless transfer feature
15 Shrinks
17 David's foe
18 Türkiye's President
19 Improve, as a deal
21 Chocolate and caramel candy
22 Like granola
25 ResLife workers
26 Higher than baritone
27 Film rating org.
28 10-1
30 911 responder
31 Poland's capital
33 Fishy bagel topping
34 "Are you today's date? Because you're a ___", and what you'll have found when you fill all the circled letters
38 2,000 pounds
39 ___ & World Report
42 Navigational aid, for short
45 Fifty to two
48 Vegetarian protein source
49 Devoured
51 Auto ID
52 15 mins into a 9:45 class
53 2019 Tyler, the Creator album
54 Moore?
56 "The Tempest" servant
58 Accomplice in a crime
62 "I'm only ___ away"
63 Lawrence of Italia?
64 Rudely sarcastic
65 ___ Harvey Oswald
66 "The Wasteland" poet initials

DOWN

1 "Guten ___!"
2 Carnival site
3 Offline, briefly
4 Physical strength
5 To carry, or a type of bag you might carry
6 Quadball shape
7 Oscar-winning documentary about Alex Honnold's climb up El Capitan
8 "Feel the ___"
9 Detail-oriented condition, for short
10 Benjamin ___ Paint
11 Nickname for something important
12 Winter Carnival race
14 CDC member?
16 Bull's sound
20 Light brown
22 "Be there soon!", briefly
23 MLA alternative
24 Small pie
26 Where you might find 3-Down or 22-Down
28 Setup for a three-run homer
29 Like a buzzkill
32 Playwright Chekhov
35 Haphazardly
36 Alliance, like the one between the UK, France, and Russia during WWI
37 Second lightest noble gas
40 Course offered through MMC
41 Total
42 Insurance co. with a spokeslizard
43 Atypical religious followers
44 Obtained illegally
46 Sn
47 "The be-all and ___"
50 Lucas' younger sister in "Stranger Things"
52 Shakespearean contraction
54 "___ Tuah with Hailey Welch"
55 Clarinet cousin
57 Mister Up's, for example
59 Explosive initials
60 Liquid meas. (a Nalgene holds 32)
61 1973 Supreme Court plaintiff Jane

VOLLEYBALL WINS 10TH STRAIGHT MATCH THIS FALL

By TING CUI
Sports Editor

COURTESY PHOTO / WILL COSTELLO

Members of the women's volleyball team celebrates during a match.

The volleyball team (11–4) notched a 3–1 victory over Tufts University (7–6) this past Saturday, marking their 10th consecutive win this season.

This triumph follows their Friday night victory against Bates College (7–6), won 3–0 in straight sets. This weekend's highlight was setter Gabbie O'Toole '25 becoming the second player in program history to surpass the 3,000 assist mark in the game against Tufts.

The Panthers remain undefeated in the NESCAC with an impressive 5–0 conference record. They kicked off their 2024 campaign with a strong start and have hopes of returning to the NCAA Tournament for the third time in four seasons.

"It's been a really exciting season so far, we have amazing team energy and a coaching staff that pushes us every day to be better," Gabby Pribisich '27 said.

The Panthers' undefeated record comes after four out-of-conference losses early in the season.

"The beginning of the season is always hard. We graduated seniors, and new people are coming in," Molly Harrison '27 said. "The main difference now is that we're coming together and playing as a team. Trust is a part of every single play."

This trust comes with both time and practice — and being intentional with what they're doing. Head Coach Sarah Raunecker '92 emphasized that the team is process oriented and they try not to get ahead of themselves.

"How you practice is how you play, and so we really have to be mindful of coming to practice with the intent of improving a little bit every day," she said.

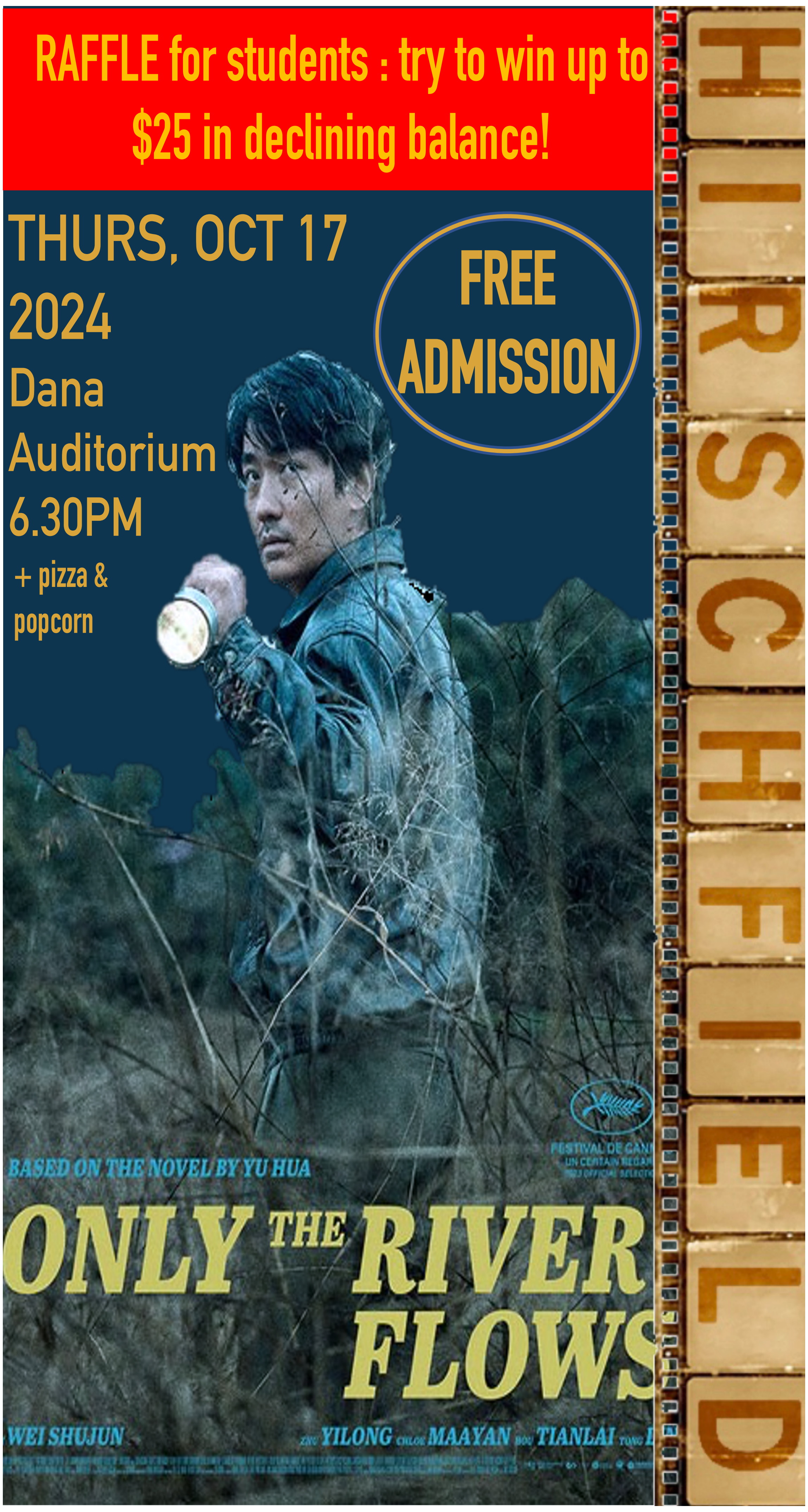
As the team has come together, they've learned a lot from their losses.

"Towards the beginning of the season, we worked hard to put all the pieces together to have a cohesive team on the court," Pribisch said. Their chemistry is one of their intangible strengths this season.

"This team in particular has great chemistry. They really all love each other and want what's best for each other. So if we change the lineup, then that person is really excited for whoever's going in, and the bench is genuinely excited for the team," Raunecker said.

Facing a conference full of tough opponents, there are no easy games ahead. Next up, Middlebury will hit the road for a NESCAC weekend, starting with a match against Bowdoin College (8–5) on Friday at 7:00 p.m., followed by a battle with Colby College (14–1) on Saturday at 2:00 p.m., as they work to secure their return to the NCAA Tournament.

"I think it will be a great matchup against Colby that will challenge us in ways we haven't been tested yet," Pribisch said. "We just need to stay focused and ready for some tough games leading up to the NESCAC tournament."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Auditorium
6.30PM
+ pizza &
popcorn

FREE ADMISSION

HIRSCHFIELD

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY YU HUA

ONLY THE RIVER FLOWS

WEI SHUJUN ZHU YILONG CHLOE MAAYAN DOU TIANLAI

Welcome back to PFL Weekly! Week three has come upon us already, and we discussed yet ANOTHER undefeated week of Middlebury sports. We highlighted a few sportscaster-worthy plays, good performances across the charts, records being broken or close to being broken and much more. We welcomed Molly Harrison '27 and Gabby Pribisich '27 into the studio from the unstoppable Middlebury volleyball team and had a great interview. Molly and Gabby told us all about team traditions, their current winning streak and their feelings about the rest of the season. We finished with some electric trivia and a great Mount Rushmore of "things to do while procrastinating." You'll never guess what got picked! Thanks for listening and see you next week.

PFL WEEKLY

The Middlebury Campus

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MIDDLEBURY TO HOST 2027 FIELD HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIP

By JACK McGUIRE
Senior Sports Editor

Middlebury's Peter Kohn Field is set to host the 2027 Division III Field Hockey Championship. This marks the first time that Middlebury will host the national championship for field hockey.

The school has only hosted 12 NCAA National Championships in Middlebury Athletics history, with the most recent event being the 2022 women's ice hockey championship. The other events hosted by Middlebury have been for skiing, men's hockey and women's hockey. This is the first time the school will host a fall national championship.

The field hockey team will hopefully continue their era of dominance and play a championship game at home in 2027. The team, looking to win their seventh consecutive national championship this year, has had to play on the road in past years during the postseason. In 2023, the Panthers won their national championship in Newport News, Va., and the year before, they won in Glassboro, N.J.

Peter Kohn Field has also undergone a number of renovations in recent years to make it an ideal site to host a NCAA Championship. This past summer, the school installed a two-story pressbox on the field. Two years ago, the field was resurfaced, and in 2011, the school added lights to the complex, allowing the field hockey and women's lacrosse teams to play night games.

While 2027 is still a few seasons away, the field hockey team is making good progress in their quest to win another championship this year. This past weekend, the Panthers (10–0) earned two wins on the road, beating Bowdoin College (3–6) on Saturday 4–1 and University of New England (5–6) on Sunday 8–1. The pair of wins gave the field hockey team ten straight wins to start the 2024 campaign and extended their winning streak to 41 games, dating back to 2022. The field hockey team is now one win short of equalling their 42 game win streak that ended two years ago.

Caroline Segal '24.5 was the star of this past weekend scoring three goals and recording one assist in the two games played. Izzy Redzic '27 also played well in goal, only allowing one goal in over 100 minutes in front of the net.

Segal is just one of countless Middlebury field hockey players that rank at the top of the NESCAC statistics leaderboards. Segal's 11 goals this year are good enough for second in the conference. Only her teammate, Georgianne Defeo '26 has more goals, with a total of 13. Amy Griffin '24.5 is second in the NESCAC with ten assists and has been in excellent form recently. The midfielder earned NESCAC Player of the Week accolades the week of Sept. 23 after registering two goals and three assists in one week.

Defensively, the Panthers are also strong. Redzic is third in the NESCAC in lowest goals against average with a mark of .720. She also has two shutouts this season.

The Panthers look to continue their dominance this weekend at home against Colby College (2–4). They are set to play at Peter Kohn Field at 12 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 12.

MIDDLEBURY

COURTESY PHOTO / MIDDLEBURY ATHLETICS

Peter Kohn Field, the home of the Middlebury field hockey team.

SEVEN QUESTIONS WITH NEEL EPSTEIN '25, MEN'S TENNIS

By JACK McGUIRE
Senior Sports Editor

Neel Epstein '25, originally from New York, N.Y., is currently on the men's tennis team. At this year's ITA New England Regional, Epstein was the singles runner-up, and he will travel to Rome, Ga. for the ITA Cup on Oct. 10.

In this edition of Seven Questions, Epstein discusses his achievements at Middlebury, his improvement as a tennis player and his favorite restaurant in town.

Jack McGuire: To start off, you were the runner up at the ITA New England Regional. Can you describe the significance of this achievement and the work that went into it?

Neel Epstein: Yeah, so our fall season is usually a shorter season. It's usually around eight weeks, and it kind of revolves around the ITA, starting with the regional, and then the national tournament. Those are kind of our two most important events of the fall. So, to be able to participate in the national tournament is a great honor, and something I've been looking forward to my entire Middlebury career. I'm excited that I finally got to participate as a senior.

JM: What is your favorite Middlebury tennis memory throughout your time here?

NE: I probably have two favorite memories. They're both in NCAA quarter final matches where we were, you know, tied 4–4 with the other team, and we were able to come up and win those matches. Once in 2023, I got to clinch the match. Then last year, in 2024, my teammate Noah Lewis '27 clinched the match. Playing in that moment and being on the sidelines watching my teammate carry us across the finish line, it's a great feeling and it gives you a lot of confidence.

JM: How did you get started playing tennis as a kid? What's been your journey to play at the collegiate level?

NE: My dad played tennis in college at Cornell, so that was kind of probably why I started playing tennis. Then, he got me into it. I actually wasn't a very competitive tennis player until a little bit later in life. Most people in collegiate tennis start playing in tournaments when they're around 10 or 11. I didn't start till I was 13 or 14. So I kind of had a later start to it, but I really fell in love with this sport. Around the age of 16 or 17, I decided that I really wanted to pursue it as a collegiate athlete, and I went to live in a tennis academy in Spain for a year. I really put a lot more effort into it and felt like I was able to get a lot better. It was always a dream of mine to play in college, and I was happy to make that happen.

JM: Why did you choose Middlebury?

NE: If we're talking about athletics specifically, there was a coach who retired two or three years ago, Bob Hansen, who is probably the greatest Division III tennis coach of all time. He's won eight or nine national championships, and he has a passion for tennis that's really contagious, and so I felt that from the first time I spoke with him, and that's what really convinced me that Middlebury was the place for me as a tennis player. Then the whole academic and student life portion of it also is very important. But to focus on that, I think that there is a special level of care and passion that people here have for tennis.

JM: How do you think you've progressed and grown as a player while at Midd?

NE: It's funny that I ended up making the ITA for singles, but I think the biggest improvement that my game is actually on is my doubles game. Last year, I played with Robbie Ward '24. He and I had had a really good year playing doubles, and I think the coaches had a strong emphasis on working on your volleys and working on your serve on volley. That focus towards those parts of my games really helped my doubles game rise. As a junior, I never did well in doubles. I was losing in the first round almost every single time. Coming to college and being able to play at a high level, I think I have made significant strides in that regard.

JM: What are your personal and team goals for this season?

NE: I think personal and team goals kind of go hand in hand. My personal goal is that the team does well. The team doing well, given that we're at a streak of countless final fours or better, means winning a national championship. Every year we don't win, I wouldn't say it's a disappointment, but it's that we feel like we came up short. I think that's always the goal in the back of our minds. These individual tournaments and accolades are nice, but at the end of the day, my personal goal is that one time during my four years here we get across the line.

JM: What is your favorite restaurant in town?

NE: My favorite restaurant in town, and I would say this goes kind of in hand with the tennis team, is Sabai Sabai. We, as a team, often like to go there the night before matches. We either get pad thai or the pad see ew, and those are two of my favorite things there. I think most of our team really likes that place.

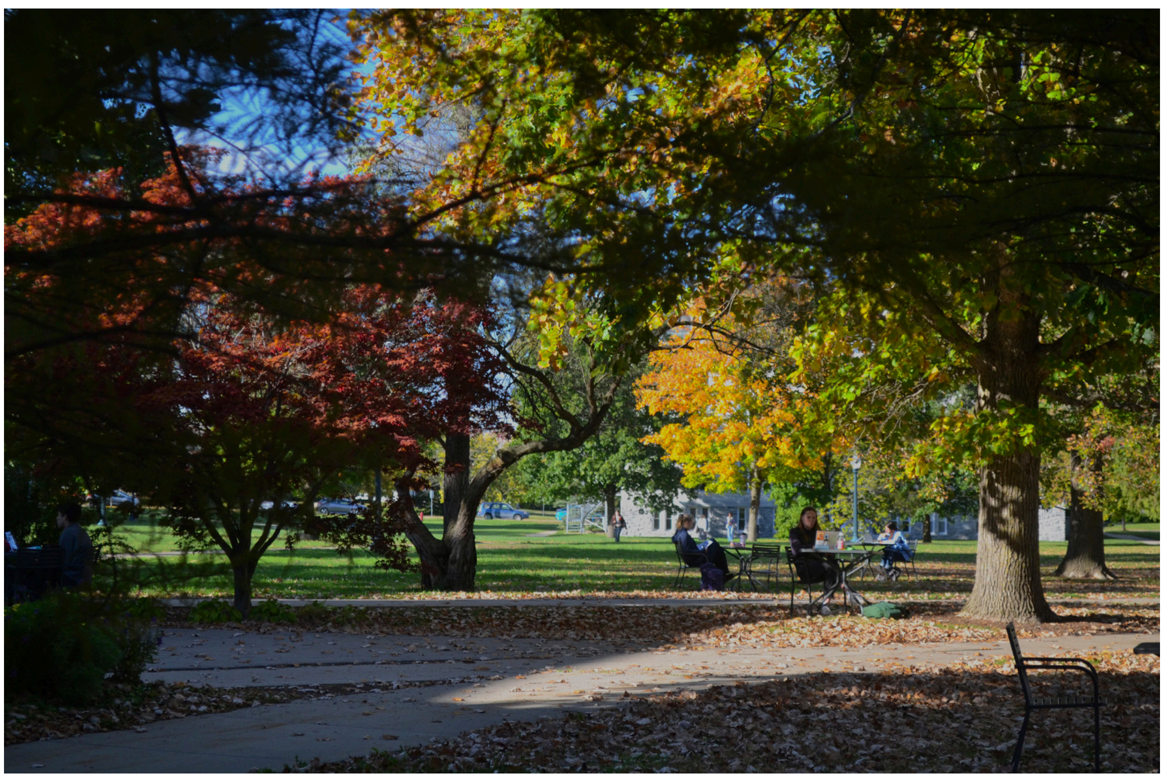
MIDDLEBURY

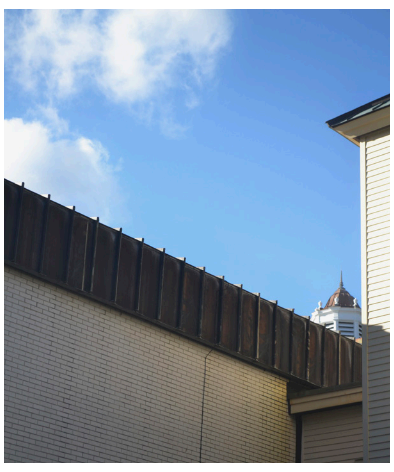
COURTESY PHOTO / MICHAEL LAST

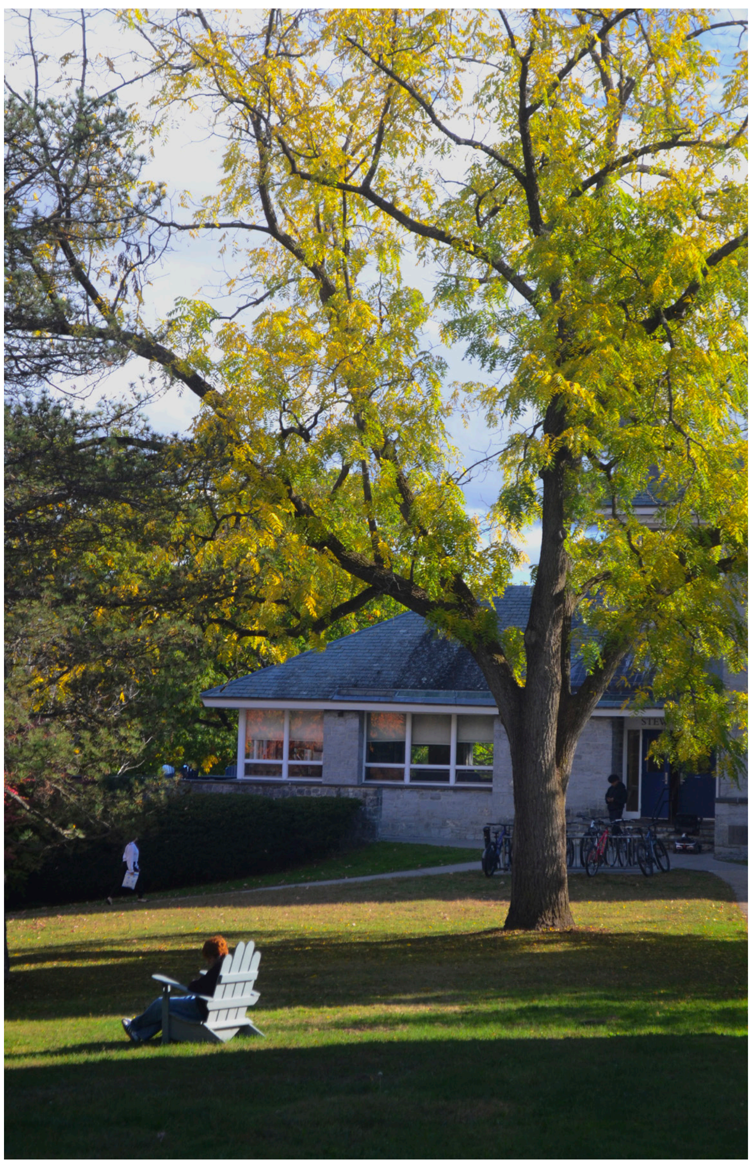
Neel Epstein '25 returns a hit at the ITA New England Regionals

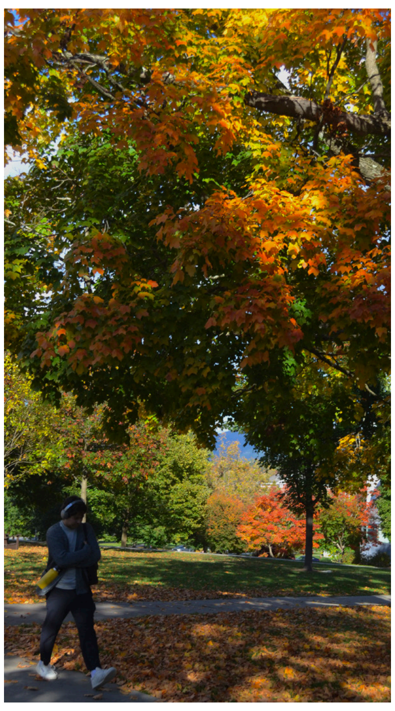
AUTUMNAL PROPAGANDA

By June Su
Senior Multimedia Editor









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